

A MARVEL MAGAZINE / FALL 1980 / 75p

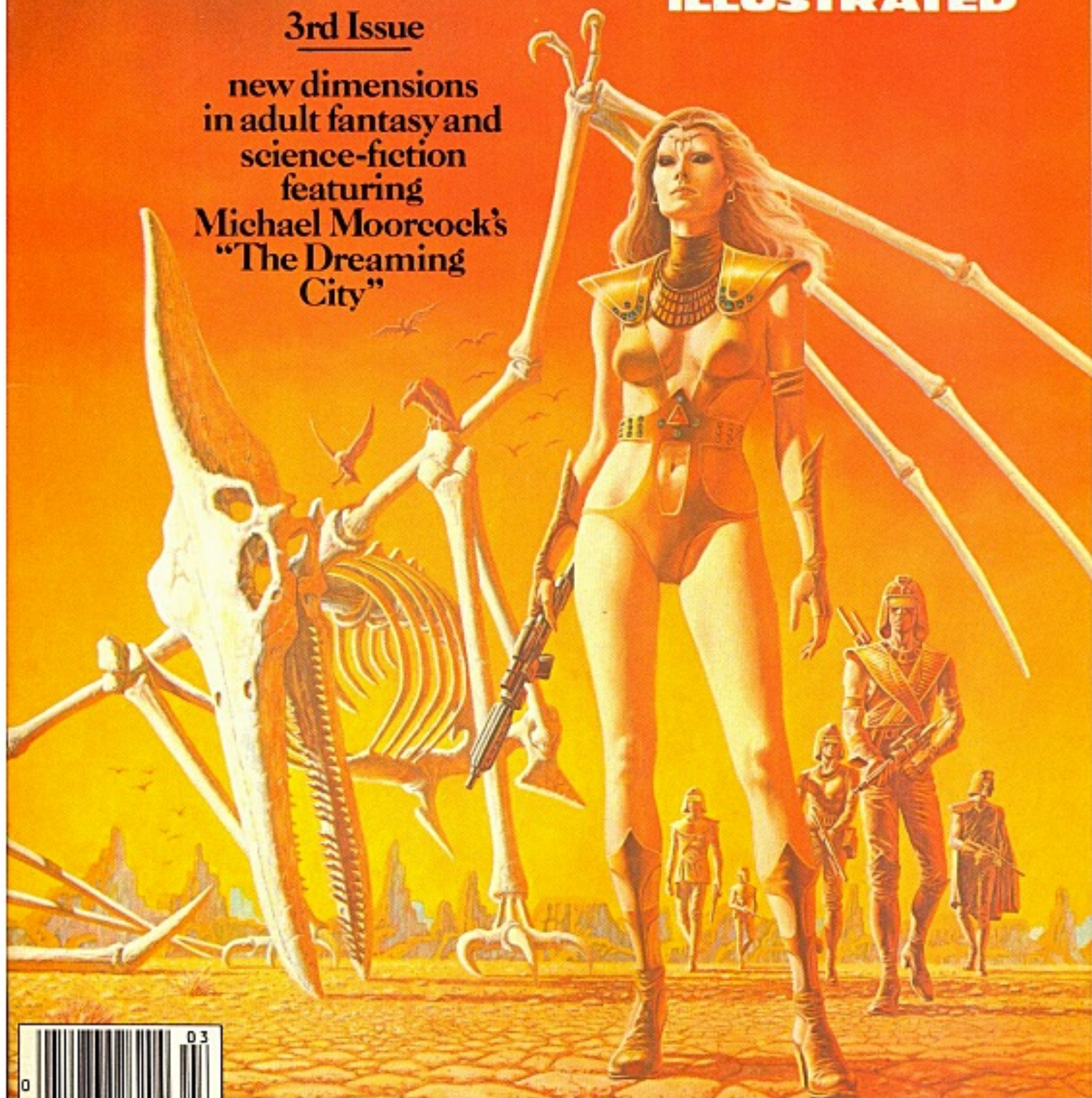
© 02620

epic™

ILLUSTRATED

3rd Issue

new dimensions
in adult fantasy and
science-fiction
featuring
Michael Moorcock's
"The Dreaming
City"



Galaxy ©80



epic

ILLUSTRATED

FALL 1980 VOL. 1, NO. 3

CONTENTS

Overview/Page 6
notes on stories and contributors

The Dreaming City/Page 9

Michael Moorcock's haunted sword and sorcery hero, Elric of Melniboné, turns his powers against his own people; first of two parts
script by Roy Thomas; art by P. Craig Russell

Metamorphosis Odyssey: Vanth/Page 22

chapter V: on a frozen world, Aknaton seeks a living legend
story & art by James Starlin

Forest Magic/Page 32

the daughter of a witch plots the downfall of a castle
story by Archie Goodwin; art by George Bush

Libido/Page 35

crime and punishment in a future world not many tomorrows removed from now
story by Doug Moench; art by Paul Gulacy

Feedback/Page 41

letters & comments

Almuric: Part II/Page 42

continuing our adaptation of Robert E. Howard's only interstellar fantasy;
Esau Cairn battles for a place amid his savage captors
script by Roy Thomas; art by Tim Conrad

Worker in the City/Page 54

a running man; a waiting refuge; the ultimate fate
story by Archie Goodwin; art by Terry Lindall

The Gamesmen of Earth Prime/Page 59

from Dungeons & Dragons to Time Tripper; the wonderful world of wargaming
article by Dennis O'Neil & Mike W. Barr; illustrated by Michael Golden

Metamorphosis Odyssey: The Meeting/Page 67

chapter VI: as a Zygotean trap closes, the wielder of the sword of fire appears
story & art by James Starlin

Midsummer's Night Dream/Page 75

the hazards of maintaining a teleportation relay
story & art by Robert Wakelin

My Room/Page 82

a brief discourse on the importance of controlling one's environment
story & art by Paul Kirchner

Tomb Stones/Page 85

dedication and obedience during interplanetary war
story by Bruce Jones; art by Michael Saenz

Cover/Paul Gulacy



EPIC ILLUSTRATED™ is published by MARVEL COMICS GROUP, OFFICE OF PUBLICATION, 575 Madison Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10022. James E. Calton, President. Stan Lee, Publisher. Published four times a year. Copyright © 1980 by MARVEL COMICS GROUP, A Division of Cadence Industries Corporation. All rights reserved. Vol. 1, No. 3, Fall 1980 issue. Price \$2.00 per copy in the U.S. and Canada. Subscription rate \$8.00 for 4 issues in the U.S. \$9.00 Canada, \$10.00 Foreign. All business inquiries should be addressed to Ed Shukin, V.P. of Circulation, 9th floor. No similarity between any of the names, characters, persons and/or institutions in this magazine with those of any living or dead person or institution is intended, and any such similarity which may exist is purely coincidental. Printed in the United States of America. This periodical may not be sold except by authorized dealers, and is sold subject to the conditions that it shall not be sold or distributed with any part of its cover or markings removed, nor in a mutilated condition. Publisher disclaims all responsibility to return unsolicited editorial matter. Letters to EPIC ILLUSTRATED or its editors become the property of the magazine and are assumed intended for publication and republication in whole or part, and may therefore be used for those purposes. No part of this magazine may be reproduced without written permission from Marvel Comics Group and the individual copyright holders.

A tale of
ELRIC
of Melniboné,
and of his enchanted runesword Stormbringer,
also called Stealer of Souls.



**THE
DREAMING
CITY**
Part One

Script:
ROY THOMAS

Art:
P. CRAIG RUSSELL

Adapted from the story by
MICHAEL MOORCOCK

SOMEWHERE ON THE LONELY COAST OF A WINDSWEEP FJORD, A HEAVY, OAKEN DOOR IS FLUNG WIDE...



... AND THE LIGHT FROM WITHIN SENDS SHADOWS FORTH TO FENCE WITH THOSE LURKING OUTSIDE.



SORRY I'M LATE, MY FRIENDS.

WHAT'S THE HOUR?



MIDNIGHT IS LONG PAST, COUNT SMORGAN.

ARE YOU STILL SURE HE'LL COME?



IT'S SAID THAT HE'S A MAN OF HIS WORD...



... IF THAT COMFORTS YOU.



THAT'S SO-- FOR ALL YOUR IRONY, YARIS.

HE'LL COME, RIGHT ENOUGH.



HE'S GROWN BITTER, AND HAS NO LOVE FOR HIS COUSIN. WHY SHOULD HE?

AFTER ALL, YIRKON SITS THE RUBY THRONE IN HIS PLACE, AND HAS PROCLAIMED HIM AN OUTCAST-- A TRAITOR.

HE NEEDS US...



... SO WE CAN TRUST HIM.

YOU'RE **FULL** OF TRUST TONIGHT, COUNT-- A RARE THING TO FIND IN THESE TROUBLED TIMES.

BUT, PERHAPS I SPEAK TO MEN MORE **CREDULOUS** THAN I.

WHAT OF **YOU**, DHARMIT? SHALL WE WASTE **MORE** TIME WAITING ON ELRIC'S PLEASURE?

THINK YOU NOT, FADAN OF LORMYR, THAT HE'S EVEN NOW **LAUGHING** AT US IN SOME DISTANT TAVERN?

AND YOU, KING NACLON-- DO YOU NOT SUSPECT HE MAY BE PLOTTING WITH THE DRAGON PRINCES TO **ENTRAP** US, AT THIS VERY MOMENT?

AND **YOU**, JIKU-- DO NOT THINK--

I **THINK**, YARRIS, THAT YOU BEGIN TO **BORE** ME WITH YOUR PRATTLE.

WELL, I'M NEITHER **BORED**... NOR YET **CONVINCED**.

HAVE YOU **EVIDENCE** TO BACK YOUR CHARGES, YARRIS?

I ONLY KNOW THAT WE HAVE **TOO LITTLE** TIME IN WHICH TO STRIKE; OUR FLEET IS TOO BIG, TOO NOTICEABLE.

I SAY, LET'S SET SAIL **NOW**, BEFORE THE DREAMING CITY HEARS OF OUR PLAN AND BRINGS UP REINFORCEMENTS!

YOU KNOW WE CANNOT REACH IMRRYR WITHOUT ELRIC'S HELP.

WE MUST WAIT FOR HIM-- OR ELSE **GIVE UP** OUR PLANS AND RETURN TO OUR HOMELANDS.

BY THE GODS, YOU'RE GETTING **OLD**, ALL OF YOU!

TREASURES ARE WON ONLY BY SWIFT SLAYING AND RECKLESS ATTACK!

FOOL!

I SPOKE THUS IN MY YOUTH... AND LOST A **FINE FLEET** SOON AFTER.



IT'S TRUE-- WE STAND HERE,
THE MOST POWERFUL **SEA LORDS** IN THE WORLD.

OUR NAMES ARE FEARED
AND FAMOUS; OUR FLEETS
RAVAGE THE COASTS OF A
SCORE OF LESSER NATIONS.

WE HOLD
POWER!



BUT ALL THIS IS
USELESS-- WITHOUT
THE POWER THAT
ELRIC HAS.

THE POWER OF
KNOWLEDGE--
OF **SORCERY**,
IF I MUST USE
THE HATED
WORD!



IMRRYR, THE DREAMING
CITY, DREAMS IN PEACE--
AND WILL CONTINUE TO DO
SO UNLESS HE GUIDES US
THROUGH THE TREACHEROUS
WATERWAYS WHICH LEAD
TO HER HARBORS.

WE **NEED**
ELRIC. WE
KNOW IT,
AND HE
KNOWS IT.

THAT'S
THE
TRUTH!



SUCH
CONFIDENCE,
GENTLEMEN...



...IS
WARMING
TO THE
HEART.

WHAT REMAINS OF
YARIS' BRAVADO FLEES
FROM HIM AS HE
MEETS THE CRIMSON
EYES OF THIS PURE
ALBINO WHO AFFECTS
THE DRESS OF A
SOUTHERN BARBARIAN.

THEY ARE OLD
EYES IN A
FINE-FEATURED,
YOUTHFUL FACE...
EYES WHICH
STARE INTO
ETERNITY.





CYMORIL! AT THE
VERY SOUND OF HER
NAME UPON HIS
OWN PALE LIPS,
ELRIC KNOWS
VISIONS OF ANOTHER
LAND, AND OTHER
DAYS.

BUT YRKHOON USURPS
THESE VISIONS, ALSO--
EVEN AS HE ONCE
USURPED THE RUBY
THRONE, FROM WHICH
HE WOULD ORDER HIS
ALBINO COUSIN'S DEATH,
IF EVER HE WERE CAUGHT
WITHIN THE WALLS OF
IMRRYR.

IMRRYR.

THE DREAMING CITY FELL, IN
SPIRIT, FIVE HUNDRED YEARS AGO.

IF ELRIC OF MELNIBONÉ
HAS HIS WAY, SHE SOON
WILL FALL COMPLETELY--
AND FOREVER.

IMRRYR...

A VOICE WHICH PRETENDS TO
MORE CONFIDENCE THAN IT
FEELS CALLS HIM BACK...

HOW SHALL
WE HIDE
THE FLEET,
LORD ELRIC?

I'LL GO
NOW TO
HIDE IT
FOR YOU.

COUNT SMIORGAN, WILL
YOU MAKE CERTAIN ALL
YOU SEA LORDS' MEN ARE
OFF THE SHIPS FIRST?

AS YOU
WISH, MY
FRIEND.

HOW COULD
HE HIDE OUR
WHOLE
FLEET IN
THIS SINGLE
FJORD?

THE QUESTION HOVERS
UNANSWERED IN THE AIR...

...FOR A
CONSIDERABLE
TIME.

THEN, AT THE SOUND OF
A SLAMMING DOOR...

COUNT SMIORGAN!
WHY ARE YOU
SHIVERING, MAN?

WELL? DID ELRIC
HIDE THE FLEET--
OR DID HE NOT?

HE... HAS
HIDDEN IT.

ALL AT ONCE? WHAT DID HE DO?

LET ME,
DHARMIT.

IT'S NO
GOOD.

THE NIGHT
MIST'S TOO
THICK.



I CAN'T TELL
WHETHER OUR
SHIPS ARE
ANCHORED IN
THE FJORD
OR NOT.



WAIT!
THERE'S
SOME-
THING--



UAAA...

WHAT IS
IT, YARIS?

IT'S--



--G-GREETINGS,
LORD ELRIC--!



WINE.



WINE,
DO YOU
HEAR
ME?

HERE...
BUT
WHAT...?



I'VE DONE
WHAT'S NEEDED...
AND IT'S COST
ME HARD.



NOW
I WILL
SLEEP.



NONE OF
THE SIX
SEA LORDS
SLEEPS
OVERMUCH
THIS
NIGHT...

... WHILE IN
THE MORNING,
THE DOOR IS
UNBARRED...



... AND THE ALBINO
MISSING FROM HIS
PLACE BY THE FIRE.



THE WAKING NOBLES
WOULD SEEK HIM OUT,
BUT THE MIST IS
STILL QUITE HEAVY...



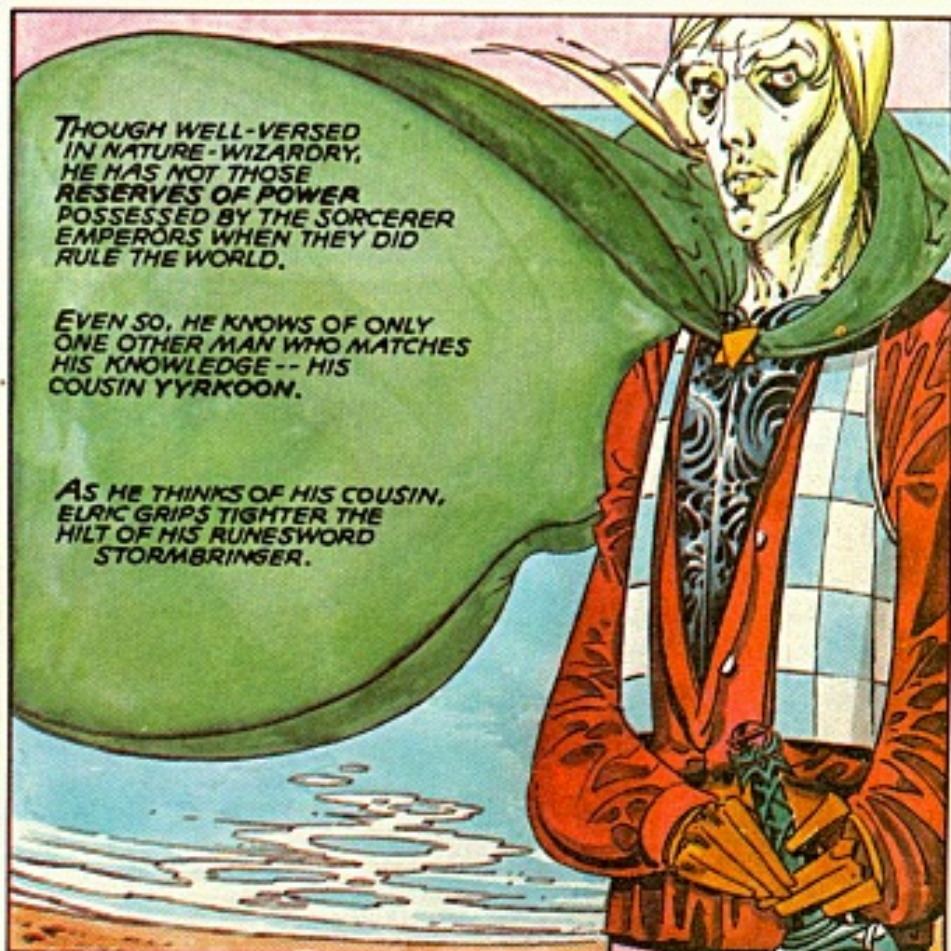
... SO THAT, WHEN THEY WANDER OUTSIDE, THEY SOON LOSE SIGHT OF ONE ANOTHER, THOUGH
SCARCELY TWO FEET
SEPARATES ANY
OF THEM.



THOUGH WELL-VERSED
IN NATURE-WIZARDRY,
HE HAS NOT THOSE
RESERVES OF POWER
POSSESSED BY THE SORCERER
EMPERORS WHEN THEY DID
RULE THE WORLD.

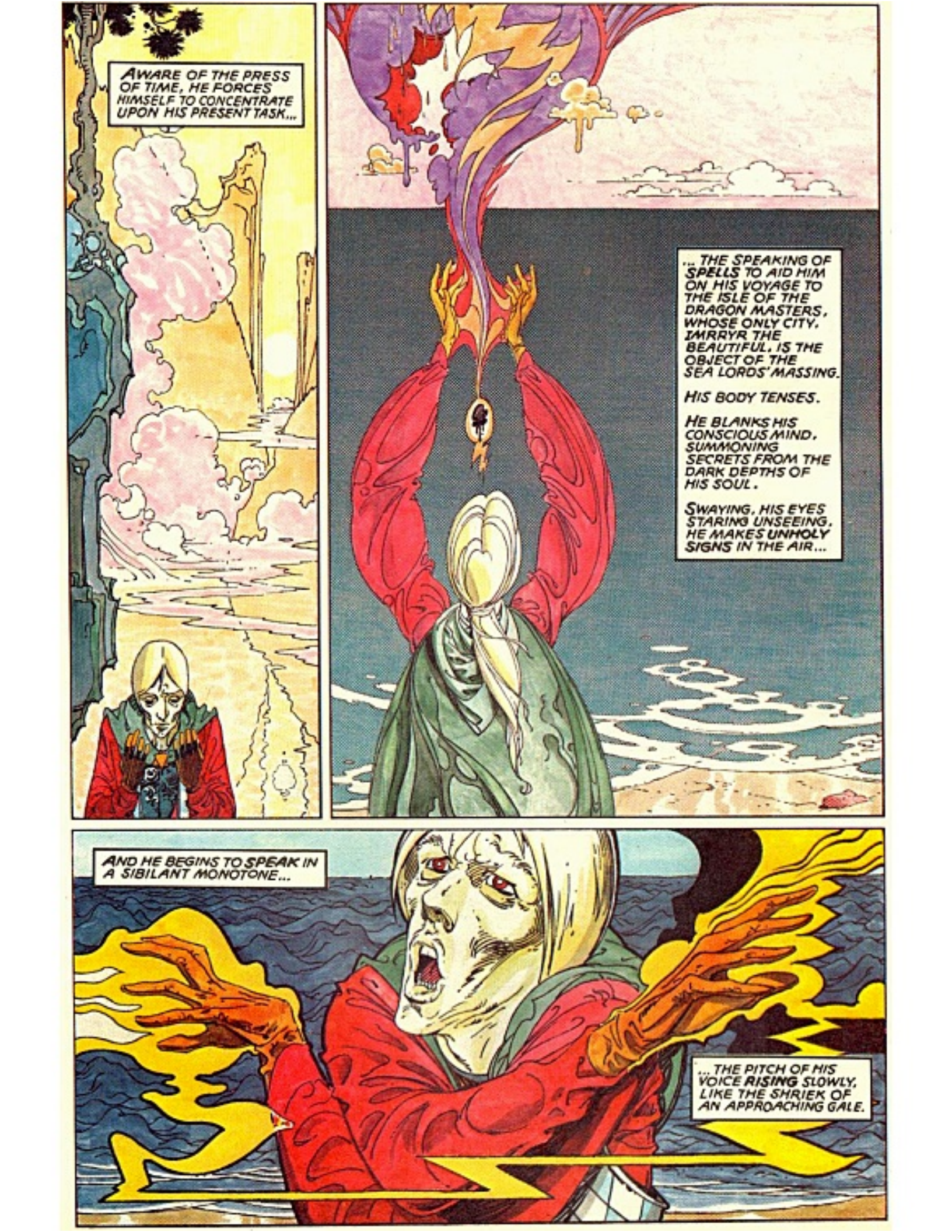
EVEN SO, HE KNOWS OF ONLY
ONE OTHER MAN WHO MATCHES
HIS KNOWLEDGE -- HIS
COUSIN YYRKOON.

AS HE THINKS OF HIS COUSIN,
ELRIC GRIPS TIGHTER THE
HILT OF HIS RUNESWORD
STORMBRINGER.



UPON THE NARROW BEACH,
ELRIC FEELS FITTER THAN
HE DID LAST NIGHT, WHEN
HE EXPENDED ALL HIS
STRENGTH IN CONJURING
THE MIST.





AWARE OF THE PRESS
OF TIME, HE FORCES
HIMSELF TO CONCENTRATE
UPON HIS PRESENT TASK...

... THE SPEAKING OF
SPELLS TO AID HIM
ON HIS VOYAGE TO
THE ISLE OF THE
DRAGON MASTERS,
WHOSE ONLY CITY,
IMRRYR THE
BEAUTIFUL, IS THE
OBJECT OF THE
SEA LORDS' MASSING.

HIS BODY TENSES.

HE BLANKS HIS
CONSCIOUS MIND,
SUMMONING
SECRETS FROM THE
DARK DEPTHS OF
HIS SOUL.

SWAYING, HIS EYES
STARING UNSEEING,
HE MAKES UNHOLY
SIGNS IN THE AIR...

AND HE BEGINS TO SPEAK IN
A SIBILANT MONOTONE...

... THE PITCH OF HIS
VOICE RISING SLOWLY,
LIKE THE SHRIEK OF
AN APPROACHING GALE.

THEN, QUITE SUDDENLY, THAT VOICE RISES HIGHER, UNTIL IT IS HOWLING WILDLY, INHUMANLY, AS IT SUMMONS THE WIND ELEMENTALS:

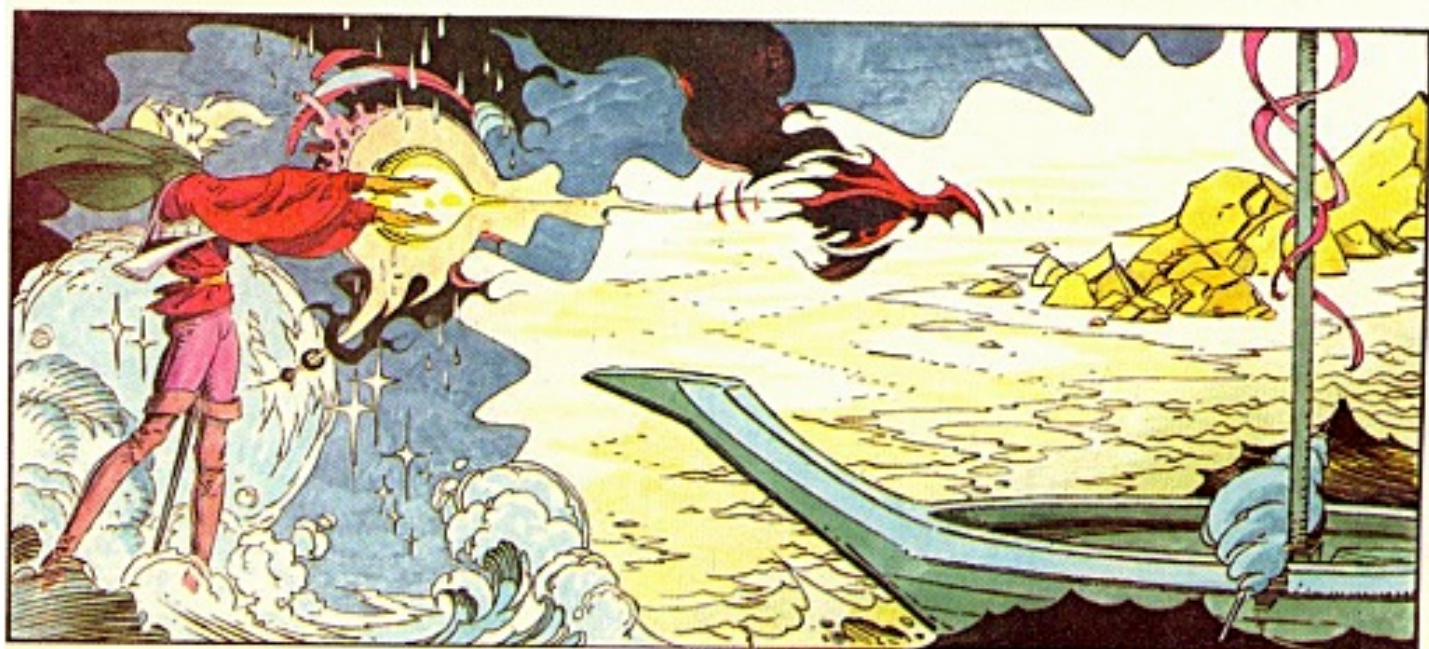


THE SYLPHS OF
THE BREEZE...

THE SHARNAMS,
MAKERS OF
GALES...

THE H'HAAR-
SHANNS,
BUILDERS OF
WHIRLWINDS.

HAZY AND FORMLESS, THEY EDDY ABOUT HIM AS, STIFF-LIMBED, HE ENTERS HIS OWN SAILING-BOAT.





LIKE AN AUTOMATON, HIS FINGERS RUN UP THE SAIL, SET IT.



THEN, FROM OUT OF THE PLACID SEA, A GREAT WAVE...



... WHICH SMASHES DOWN UPON THE SMALL SHIP, BEARING IT OUT TO SEA.



AND ALL THE WHILE, ELRIC SITS BLANK-EYED IN THE STERN, CROONING HIS HIDEOUS SONG OF SORCERY...



... AS THE SHRIeking SPIRITS OF THE AIR PLUCK AT THE SAIL AND SEND HIM FLYING OVER THE WATER...



... WITH ONLY WIND-DEMONS FOR HIS SHIPMATES.

Wuth

THE OUTER PLANETS REFER TO IT AS VEGA, BUT TO ITS INHABITANTS, IT'S KNOWN AS BYFEXIA, A WORLD AT WAR.

THE BEAUTY OF THE NEW DAY SURROUNDS AND MOMENTARILY COMFORTS YOU.

BUT YOUR SERENITY IS SUDDENLY SHATTERED BY THE CRACKLE OF POWER.

HIS EYES DAMN HIM AS AN OFF-WORLDER. THE PAST MONTHS OF STRUGGLE, HARDSHIP AND DEATH DETERMINE YOUR RESPONSE AND HIS FATE.



I'M OF GOOD
ORSIROSIAN
STOCK!

BUT I FEAR THERE'S
ONLY ONE WAY TO PROVE
THAT TO YOU...



...THE HARD WAY!



IF I WERE A
ZYGOTEAN, YOUR
INNARDS WOULD
NOW BE NO MORE
THAN CRIMSON
GEOMETRIC PATTERNS
SPATTERED ACROSS
THIS VIRGINAL
SNOW...

...INSTEAD
YOU FIND YOUR
BACKSIDE
INTACT AND
RESTING
ON IT!

I HOPE
I'VE MADE MY
POINT.

THAT YOU HAVE,
STRANGER...

IF YOU'RE NO ZYG,
THEN WHO OR
WHAT ARE YOU?



I AM ANKATON
OF ORSIARDS, LIKE
YOURSELF, AN
ENEMY OF THE
ZYGOTE EMPIRE.

I'VE BEEN LURKING
ABOUT THIS ZYGOTE
ENCAMPMENT BELOW
HOPING TO COME
ACROSS A RESISTANCE
FIGHTER LIKE YOU.

WHY?

TO HELP ME FIND A MAN WHO
WILL IN TURN AID ME IN RIDDING
THE HEAVENS OF THE
FOUL ZYGOTEANS.

WHO IS IT
YOU SEEK,
OFF-WORLDER?

8533398-89-99

Attention: perimeter

10-pos: 1 byfrewian

male warrior

1 orsirosian male

high lord

CONNECTION AED-

dispatch A-team

teleport

I DON'T KNOW HIS
NAME, BUT I'M SURE
HIS FAME WILL BE KNOWN
TO YOU. THE MAN I
SEEK IS MOST LIKELY A
GREAT WARRIOR...

... A WARRIOR
WHO CARRIES
COLD DEATH IN
THE FORM OF
A STRANGE
GLOWING
SWORD.

GLOWING
SWORD!

YOU SEEK
VANTH!

THEN YOU DO
KNOW HIM. THIS
IS BETTER THAN I
DARED HOPE FOR.

HE IS THE LAST
LINK OF A CHAIN
I NEED TO
CRUSH THE
ZYGOTEANS.

YOU MUST
TAKE ME TO
HIM QUICKLY,
TIME IS OUR
ENEMY ALSO.

I...
I CAN'T.

I DON'T KNOW
YOU, ORSIROSIAN.
YOU MAY BE A
ZYG SPY TRYING
TO TRICK ME.

I DARE NOT
LEAD YOU TO
VANTH. YOU
ARE TOO
POWERFUL
TO TRUST.



SO KILL ME IF YOU MUST BUT LAW7, SON OF NIMSO WILL NOT BETRAY THE COLD MAN.

OH I SEE, HE'S YOUR LEADER. HE WOULD BE.



THAT DOES MAKE IT MORE DIFFICULT...

...BUT NOT IMPOSSIBLE.



I HATE USING THE POWER THIS WILL REQUIRE.

I'VE NEED FOR IT SOON.



BUT IF I'VE NO OTHER CHOICE...

...SO BE IT!



EXCELLENT! HE'S COMPLETELY ENTRANCED. I WAS SLIGHTLY WORRIED ABOUT THOSE GOGGLES INTERFERING WITH THE HYPNO BLAST.



NOW COME ALONG, LAW7. WE MUST BE OFF TO FIND VANTH.

YOU LEAD THE WAY.



WHILE WE WALK WHY DON'T YOU TELL ME ALL ABOUT THIS COLD MAN OF YOURS.

HE IS... OUR LEADER, PROBABLY OUR ONE HOPE TO SURVIVE THE ZYGOTE ONSLAUGHT.

HE'S ONE HELL OF A FIGHTER. HE MUST HAVE THE STRENGTH OF TWENTY NORMAL MEN.

HE DISCOVERED THE GREAT CAVERNS OUR AIR FORCES ARE HIDDEN IN AND OPERATE OUT OF. HE ALSO GEARED OUR SHIP TO PHOTONIC DRIVE.



PHOTONIC DRIVE?? SO THAT'S HOW YOUR WORLD LASTED SO LONG AGAINST THE ZYGOTEANS. YOU COULDN'T OUT-GUN THEM SO VANTH FIXED IT SO YOU COULD OUT-RACE THEIR ATOMIC BEHEMOTHS.

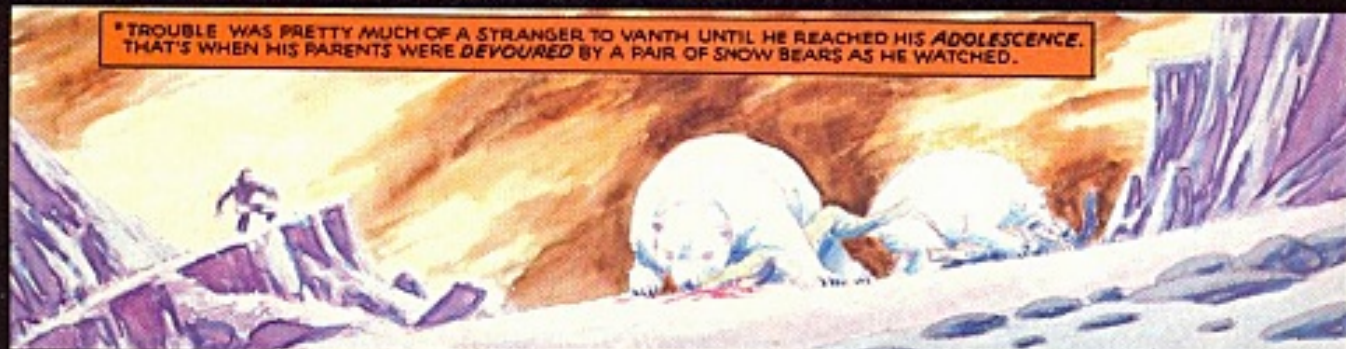
VANTH THE WARRIOR SOUNDS LIKE EVERYTHING I HAD HOPED FOR.

WHAT CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT VANTH THE MAN?

WELL, HE WAS BORN AND RAISED AS EVERY YOUTH ON BYFREXIA IS. HE WAS TAUGHT WHAT TECHNOLOGY OUR POOR WORLD HAS AND CONDITIONED TO WITHSTAND THE RIGORS OF THIS HOSTILE AND FRIGID PLANET.



*TROUBLE WAS PRETTY MUCH OF A STRANGER TO VANTH UNTIL HE REACHED HIS ADOLESCENCE. THAT'S WHEN HIS PARENTS WERE DEVoured BY A PAIR OF SNOW BEARS AS HE WATCHED.



*THEY SAY HIS MIND SNAPPED THEN AND THAT HE WANDERED FAR INTO THE WILDS WHERE HE EVENTUALLY TOOK REFUGE IN A HOLY PLACE FOLKS CALL THE ICE DEMON'S LANTERN.



*SOMETHING HAPPENED TO HIM THERE, SOMETHING STRANGE, SOMETHING AWESOME. FOR YEARS AFTER THAT HE AVOIDED PEOPLE BUT WAS OCCASIONALLY SPOTTED ROAMING THE HILLS, USUALLY NAKED.



"THEN ONE DAY HE RETURNED TO THE WORLD OF MEN JUST LONG ENOUGH TO OUTFIT HIMSELF WITH ENOUGH HUNTING GEAR TO HOLD OFF A SMALL ARMY.

"HE HAD PARENTS TO AVENGE.

"HE NEARLY DECIMATED THE ENTIRE SNOW BEAR POPULATION IN THIS REGION.

"HE CAME BACK WITH OFF-WORLD WEAPONS AND THAT BLAZING KILLER RAGE OF HIS AND SINGLEHANDEDLY SET THE ZYGOTEAN INVASION BACK MONTHS.

"FOLKS AROUND HERE DIDN'T TAKE TOO KINDLY TO THAT SEEING AS THE BEARS WERE THIS AREA'S MAIN FOOD SOURCE.

"THE REGION TOOK ON A HANGING MOOD AND SO, BEING NO ONE'S FOOL, VANTH DECIDED IT WOULD BE BEST TO STEAL A JUMP SHIP AND SAY GOOD-BYE TO BYFLEXIA FOR GOOD... OR SO EVERYONE THOUGHT.

"ALL PREVIOUS SINS WERE FORGIVEN AND IT WASN'T LONG AFTERWARDS THAT HE WAS APPOINTED SUPREME COMMANDER OF ALL BYFLEXIAN DEFENSES."

"YOU SEE, NO ONE FORESAW THE ZYG'S INVASION.

"THAT'S WHEN VANTH RETURNED.

SINCE THEN WE'VE BEEN ABLE TO CHECK THE ZYGOTES' ADVANCEMENT WITH GUERRILLA TACTICS, BUT...

BUT THERE'S ONE POINT YOU'VE NOT MENTIONED.

WHAT ABOUT THE SWORD.

YES, I KNOW... THERE DOESN'T SEEM TO BE ANY WAY TO REALLY DEFEAT THEM. I'VE WALKED THAT ROAD MYSELF.

YES... THE SWORD... THAT'S THE STRANGEST THING ABOUT VANTH, HE DOESN'T USUALLY CARRY IT. BUT SOME-TIMES IN BATTLE HE JUST SUDDENLY HAS IT.



IT'S A MARVELOUS WEAPON. IT CAN CUT THROUGH ANY...
UHG...



LAWT?

WHAT?!

WARRIORS BEING TELEPORTED IN ALL ABOUT ME!



IT'S A ZYGOTEAN A-TEAM, HARD-CORE MERCENARIES, TOUGH AND DEADLY!

I'M IN BIG TROUBLE!

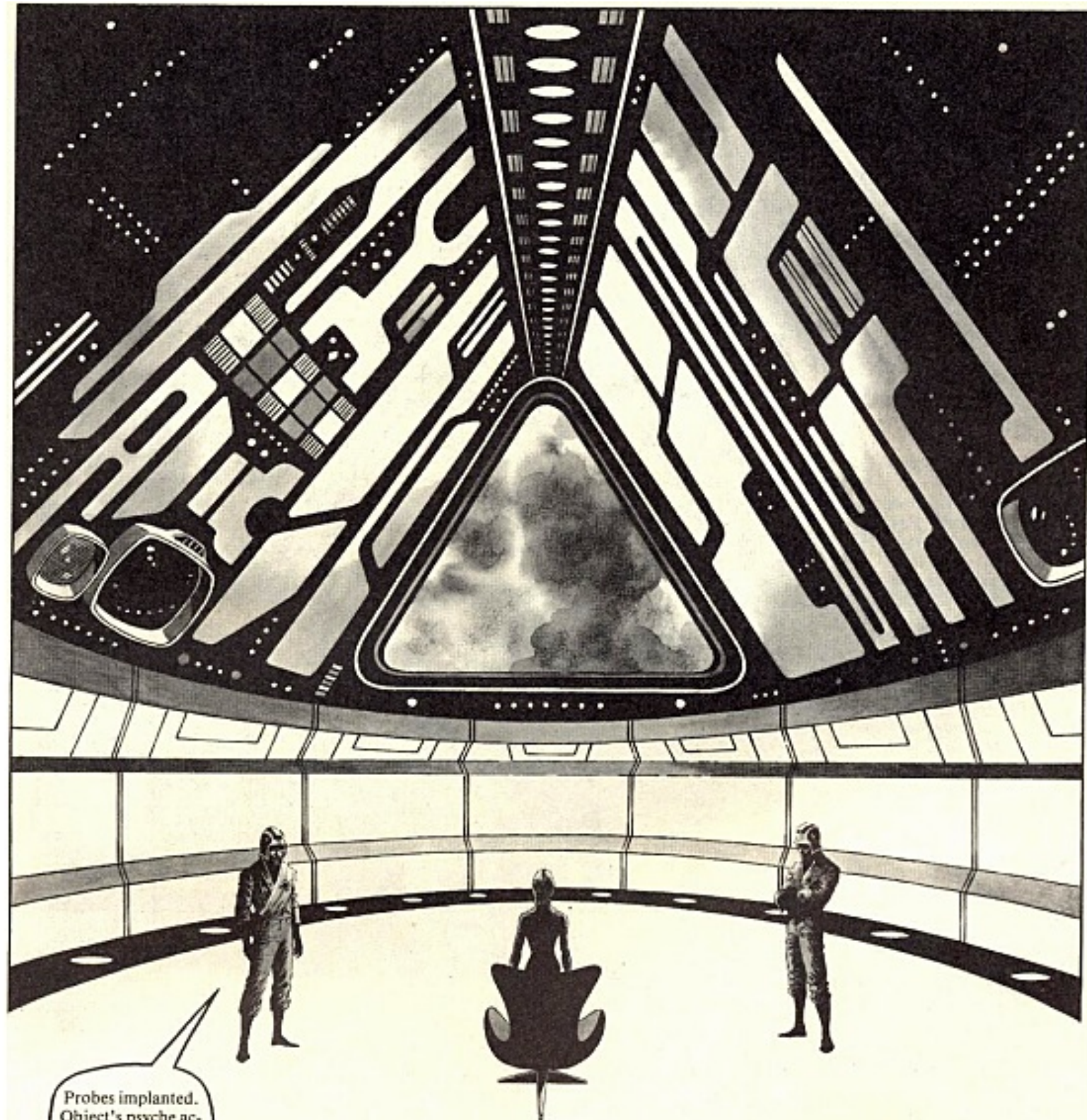
LOOK, BAZKAR, IT REALLY IS AN OREIROSIAN! I THOUGHT THEY WERE ALL DEAD!

THEY WILL BE SOON. BY THE WAY, THAT WAS A GOOD TUBE SHOT, XAM.

MUST MOVE QUICKLY OR ALL IS LOST...







Probes implanted.
Object's psyche ac-
cessible. The audit
may proceed,
Arbiter.

Noted and beginning: Object, you are a thoroughly free component of society, as all societal components are free. However, you have been taken for the commission of a crime in conflict with societal imperative, and all privacy of thought has been duly waived in your behalf.

Now: This is normally your serving period. Reveal what you would normally be doing right now, what you would and should be doing as an acceptably productive component of society, were you not being audited here and now.

LIBIDO

I would be running free and naked through clear cool air and tall rippling grasses. I would be clothed only in the moistures of my own flesh.



I would hear music in wind and bird and thunder. The sounds would fill me completely.

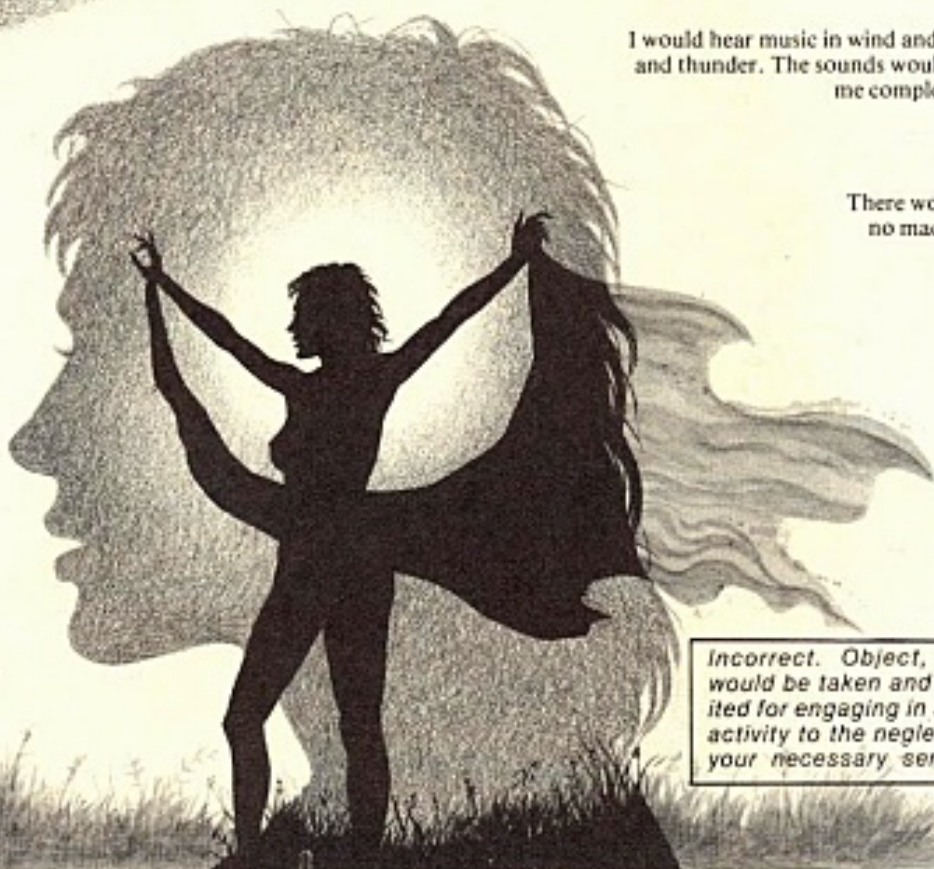
There would be no machines.

All scents would arise from things possessing life, and my breath would be vast and sweet and satisfying.

I would be aware of time only as the soft gradual shift from light to darkness, night to day.

My mind would wander far from rigid discipline, embracing the wonders of whatever my flesh chanced to encounter, tickled by random thought, soothed by the knowledge that no thought is necessary. I would dream awake.

I would come to know my hair, my breasts, my feet.



Incorrect. Object, you would be taken and audited for engaging in such activity to the neglect of your necessary service.

Imagine you are now being inevitably discovered in your transgression. Imagine you are being taken. What would you do?

Object-detected-in-state-of-transgression. To-be-taken-for-audit-by-Arbiter.



I would not be taken. I would fight for my freedom with all the valiant ferocity of a proud animal.

I would win.

I would go to... to my sexual congress partner. No, that's not right, not true. I would go to my... lover. At first he would greet me with displeasure...

Wh-what are you doing here? Where is your serving uniform? It is not liason time! Besides, we have not yet received our permits!

Forget the rules, my lover. Forget the permits. I give you my permission. It is time to be, time to live. Do what you want to do, not what the machine says.

And I would be free again, free to run free forever.

Incorrect. Object, you would then be a fugitive from the State. Where would you go?

And soon, in the embrace of soft warm magic, he would be freed too, even in the shadows of the machine, free to share my freedom...

Incorrect.

Object, no component of this perfectly realized societal structure would nor could succumb so easily, nor join you in such perverted fantasy.

But presuming your fantasy were impossibly true, Object, what would you do next?

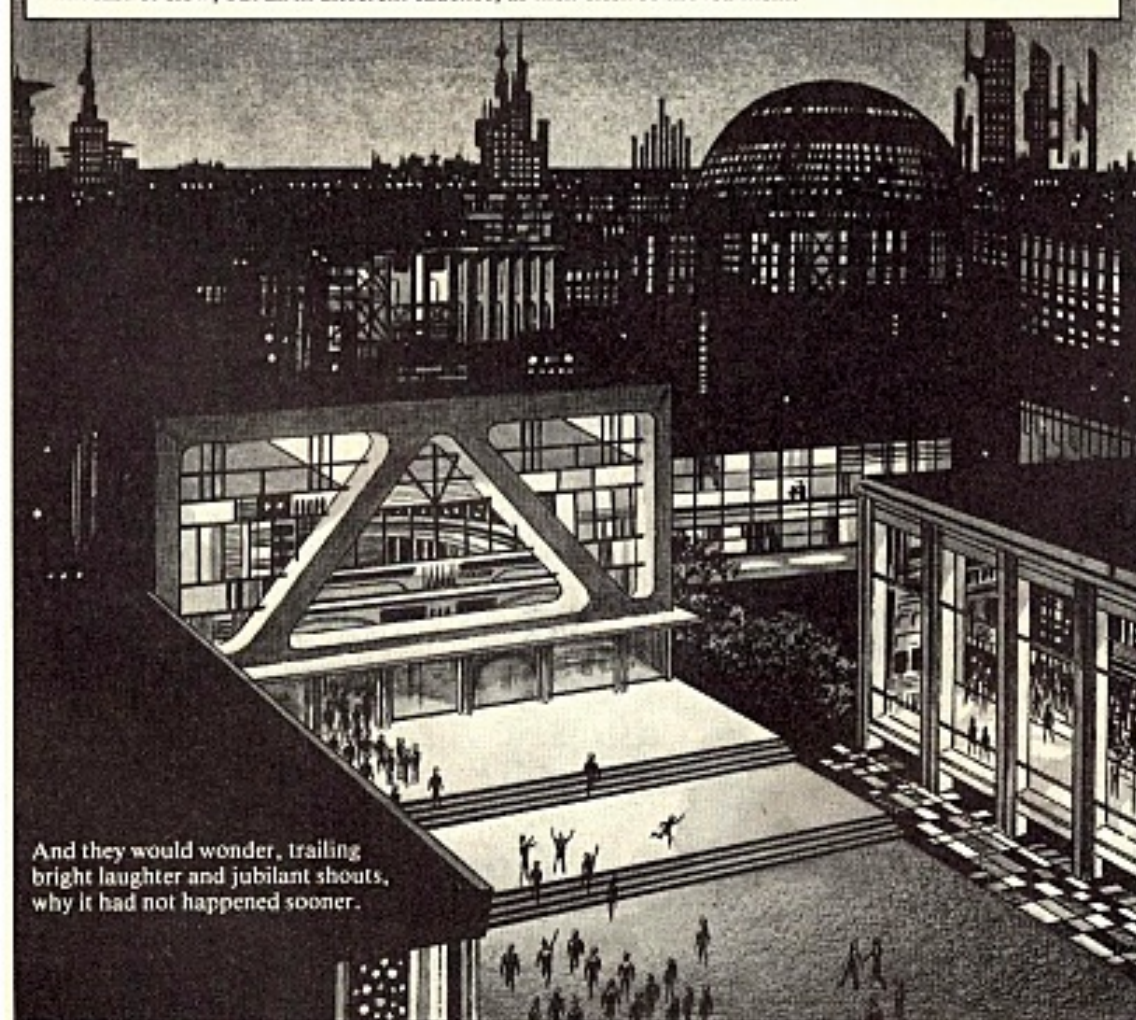


I would come to know my lover until we were as one, joined in flesh and mind and spirit. And, as we shared, so would we wish to share the sharing with others.

Together, we would call from the highest rooftop, our voices joyous in unison, exhorting all the others to free themselves, to join our joyous cries.



And they would hear us, and respond. The masses would dissolve, flowing freely into a sea of individuals, each fast or slow, but all in different cadence, as their flesh so moved them.



A soaring bird of golden hue would fly between our hearts and we would smile away the tears, and celebrate our triumph with a kiss, and also wonder why...



And they would wonder, trailing bright laughter and jubilant shouts, why it had not happened sooner.

Incorrect. Object, I have probed far enough.

Attendant-B, supply my need. Feed direct input of the actual crime.

As you require, Arbiter.

Surveillance tape introduced to your system.

You may assimilate revelation of Object's crime.

Yes, that's how it happened! That's me! We were all in the queues, waiting to file for our sexual congress permits... when I noticed him in the next queue...

...and stepped out of line...

...to speak my lover's name...

...and I... I was unable to fight. I was not a proud valiant animal -- not free at all -- for I had already been too... tamed...

Janus-- it's me.

Get away!

... and I... I was... taken.

You have now probed Object's mind and assimilated her crime. Your decision, Arbiter?

Noted and beginning: The transgression itself may not seem overly severe, but probe of Object's mind reveals subversive and regressive tendencies dangerous to society, a libido beyond control--indicating ultimate punishment.

*You may cut the probes,
attendants.*

*Impersonal and unbi-
ased decision: immedi-
ate termination.*

What--?
Termination--?
But--

Uhhh... wh-what
happened? Feel sick
...have to go to...
ablutory...

*Remove the corpus, Attendant-A. Deliver it to the protein station.
Attendant-B, you may resume.*

Uh... before resuming,
Arbiter... Attendant BX 32-
Janus requesting permission
to file for new sexual congress
partner.

*Permission granted.
You may file when
the day's serving is
done.*

Permission noted.
Thank you,
Arbiter.

Next!

ALMURIC

EPISODE TWO

ESAU CAIRN'S NARRATIVE

(AS TRANSCRIBED FROM THE DICTAPHONE JOURNAL OF PROF. AVERY HILDEBRAND, 1938)

"Let me tell of my battle with Ghor the Bear, strongest man of the city called Koth.

"For hours did it rage, there in the arena, as all time merged into a blind mist of tearing, snarling eternity... with neither man able to gain an advantage in our battle to the death.

"First he seemed to be winning, damn his hairy hide... then I... then he again

ROY THOMAS - SCRIPT
TIM CONRAD - ART
BASED ON THE NOVEL BY
ROBERT E. HOWARD

"And as we fought, amid no sound now but our own panting gasps, I thought once more of how I came to be fighting for my very life on this God-forsaken planet called Almurec!"

"Again I saw myself slaying 'Boss' Bbains in self-defense... then fleeing his state's corrupt and murderous police."

"Again I relived that great leap through space, accomplished by means of Professor Hildebrandt's mysterious 'Great Secret,' to land upon a world of wild beasts and far wilder men."

"I would be spared, I knew--perhaps even admitted to this city-dwelling tribe of ape-like men-- if I survived the onslaught of Ghor, their greatest warrior."

"yes-- if I survived!"

"Again and again, it seemed I was doomed--but always, I recovered and battled on, for I knew the fight would continue until one or both of us were dead or at least senseless."



"The crowd were screaming for still more blood as I felt Ghor for what seemed the twentieth time..."

WELL, GHOR?
DO YOU...
SURRENDER...?



GHOR
NEVER
SURRENDERS...
NEVER
LOSES!



"Yet, the
very impetus
of his
bounding
rush helped
me..."

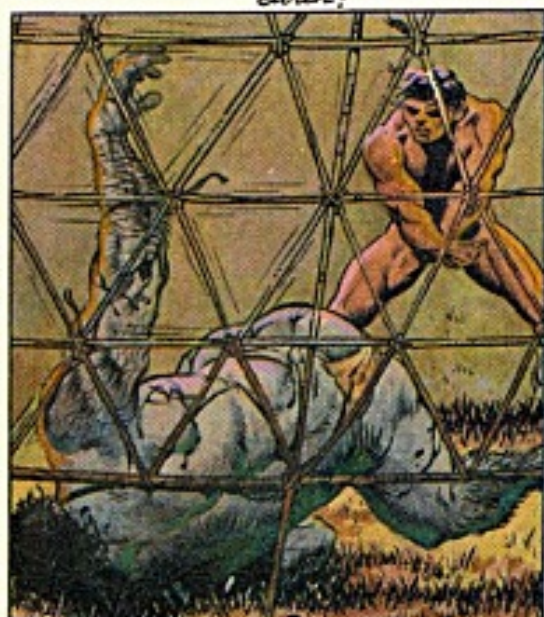
THAT'S
DEVILS!



"...as I steeled
my ebbing
strength for
one last effort..."



"...and sent my foeman crashing to earth!"



"An instant I stood
swaying above him,
while a sudden deep-
throated roar arose
from the people of
Koth..."



CAIRN!
ESAU
CAIRN!!

"Then..."



"...without
warning..."



"...a rush of
darkness brooded
out both stars and
flickering torches,
and I fell uncon-
scious across
Ghor's unmoving
form."





"Later, they told me they thought both of us must be dead..."

"...or at the very least would never walk again."

"They worked over us skillfully for hours..."



"But it was mainly our own primitive vitality that kept us both alive."

"And I awoke, days later, to hear Ghor bellowing at me from a nearby litter..."

WHAT DO YOU WANT, GHOR? ANOTHER FIGHT?...

HAN! YOU'RE THE ONLY MAN EVER TO DEFEAT ME!

BY THAK, I CAN'T WAIT TILL WE CAN FARE FORTH AND DO BATTLE TOGETHER AGAINST THE ENEMIES OF KOTH!

UH...NEITHER CAN I...MY FRIEND.



"As soon as I was well again, I was led to the great stone tower of judgment..."

"...to stand before the throne of Khosouth Skullsplitter, leader of the beast-men."

ESAU CAIRN, WE STILL CANNOT BELIEVE YOUR TALE THAT THERE IS LIFE ON DISTANT WORLDS.

STILL, YOU ARE A MIGHTY WARRIOR, NO MATTER WHERE YOU COME FROM...



FROM THIS DAY, YOU SHALL BE AS MUCH A MAN OF KOTH AS IF YOU HAD BEEN BORN INTO THE TRIBE.

AND YOU SHALL BE NAMED-- IRON-HAND!



SAY IT, KOTHAN!



**IRON-
HAND!**

*"And the great
stone tower
shuddered with
the answering
echoes from
breastlike throats."*

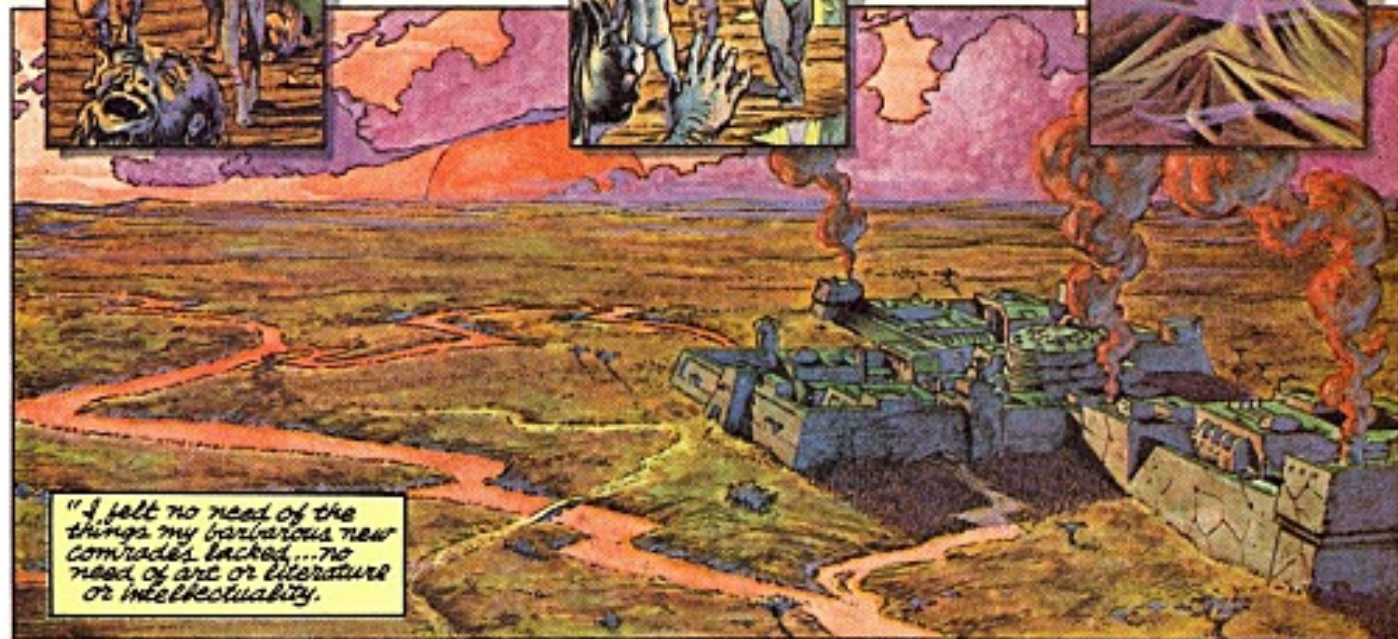
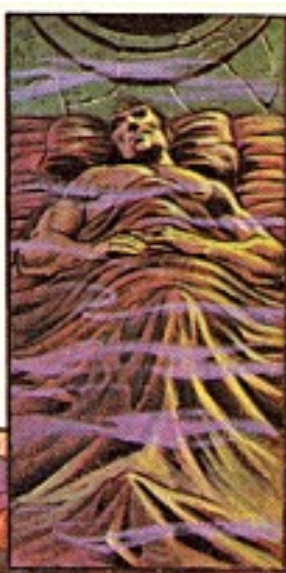
CONRAD



"For months I dwelt in Koch, coming to know its people and its life as if I myself had issued forth from the womb of a woman of Abmuric..."



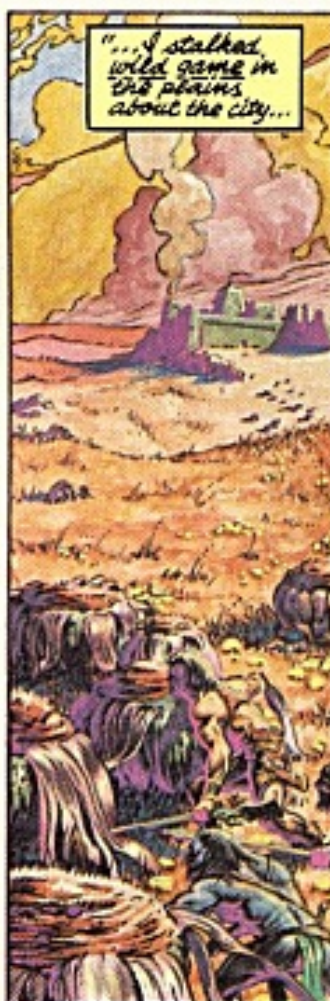
"And if, when I slept, I dreamed of Earth and the life I had left... I remember it not."



"I felt no need of the things my barbarous new comrades lacked... no need of art or literature or intellectuality."



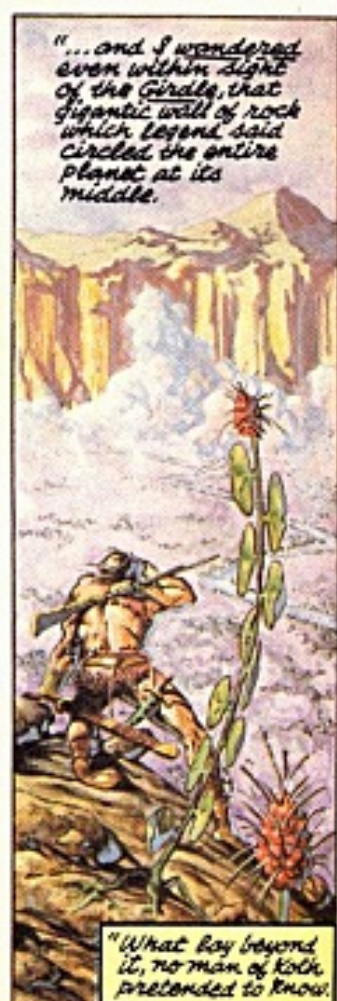
"No, rather, I hunted..."



"...I stalked wild game in the plains about the city..."



"...I fought..."



"...and I wondered even within sight of the Girdle, that gigantic wall of rock which legend said circled the entire planet at its middle."

"What lay beyond it, no man of Koch pretended to know."



"The Guras, as the
beast-men called
their own kind,
lived in their
monolithic cities,
behind high-
impregnable walls.

"Yet a few of them,
when drinking,
did speak of
things beyond..."



THE YAGAS,
YOU SAY?
WHAT ARE
THEY?

AN EVIL
RACE OF
WINGED
MEN!

THEY DWELL FAR TO
THE SOUTH, ON THE
ROCK YUTHLA.

I KNOW
NO MORE.

"And in truth, I sought to learn no more.



"Instead, I
passed my time
in friendly
bouts and
drunken brawls.

"I revelled
in my new
existence...
hunting,
gorging,
guzzling.



"I spread my
massive arms
and clutched
at life like
a glutton!

"And in my brawling and carousing, I all
but forgot the slender figure which had
watched so fearfully when I had done
battle in the arena with Ghor the Bear.

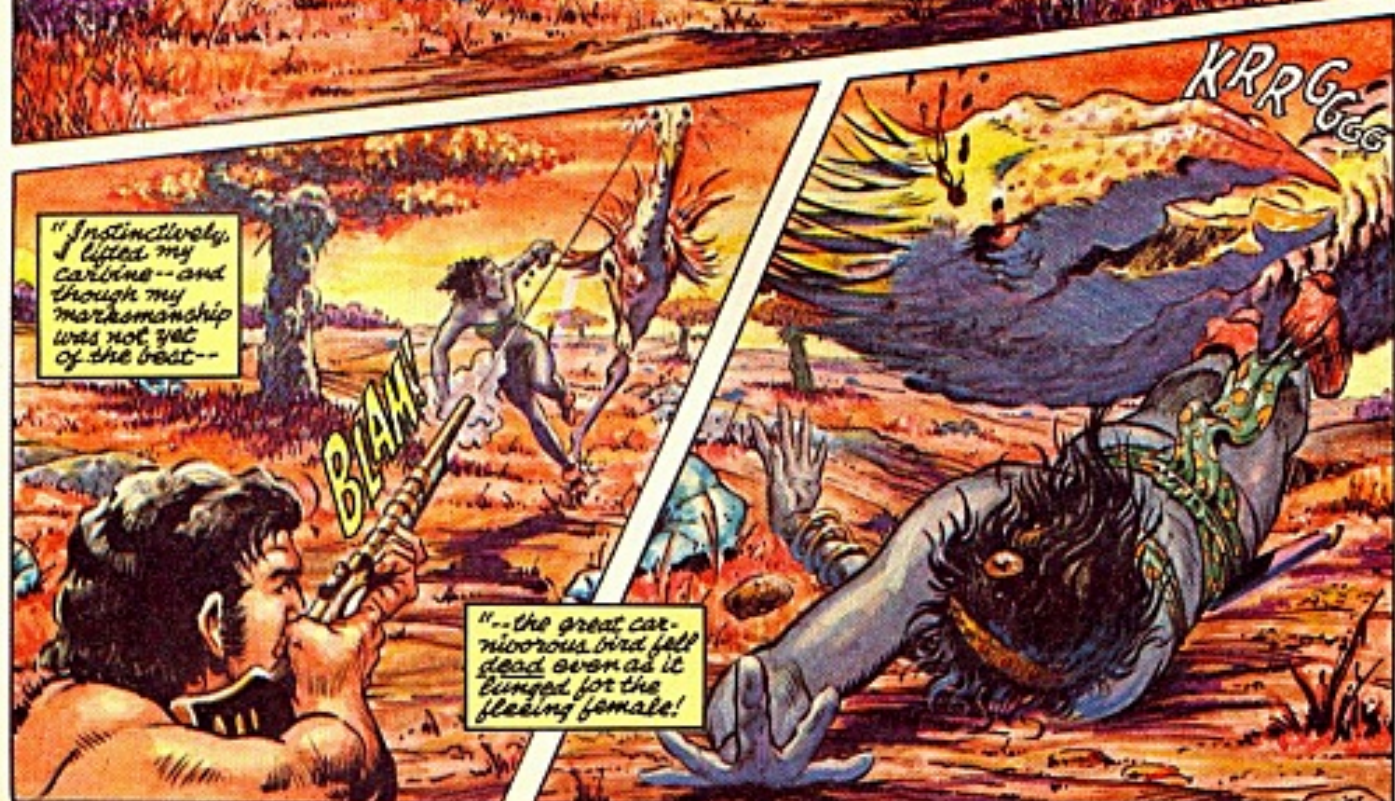
"I all but forgot... the
girl called Altha.



"I had wandered far in my hunting, and now after several days was still not back within sight of the massive towers of Koth."



"I cannot recall my thoughts, but they were likely concerned with spoils and scents..."



"Instinctively, I lifted my carbine-- and though my marksmanship was not yet of the best--

BLANK

"--the great, car-nivorous bird fell dead, even as it bumped for the fleeing female!"



"Strange that, even mesmerized as I was by Seth's words, I had not heard before the thrash of wings."

"Yet now, as I wheeled about, I saw the air above me thronged with dark and fearsome shapes..."

YAGAS!



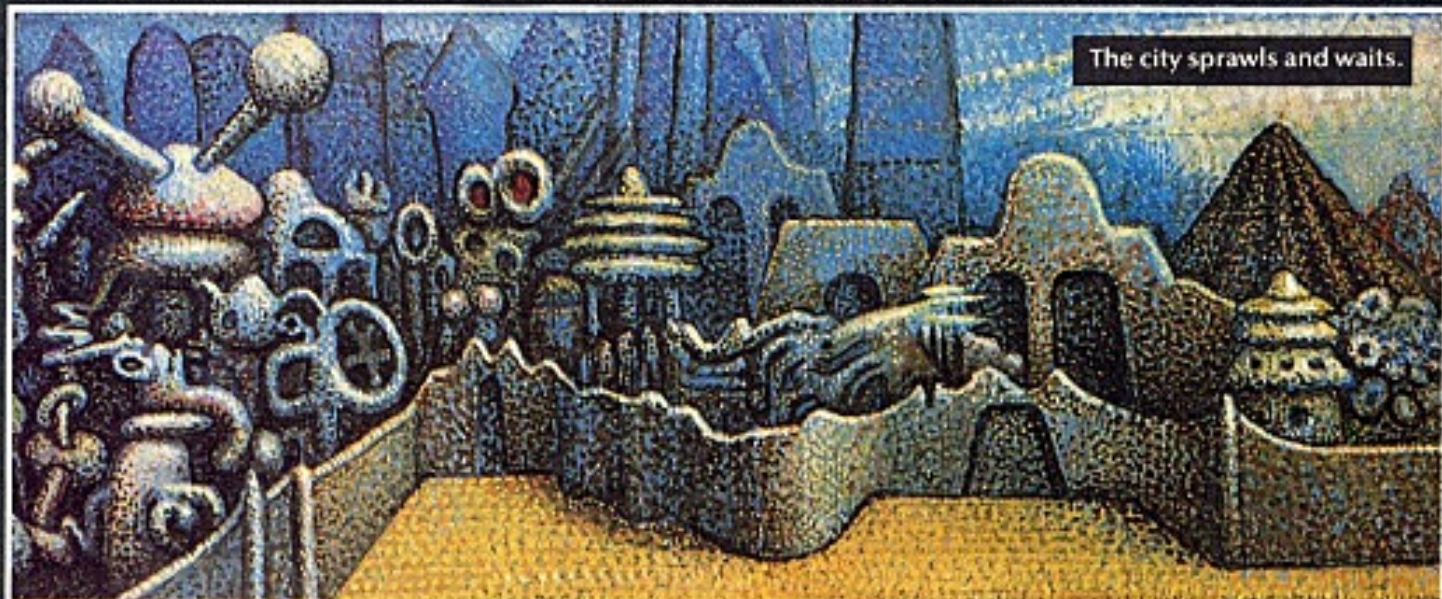
"I had heard of these terrible winged men, more demon than human-- and of how they dwelt in the grim city of Yugga, on the rock Yuthka, by the river Yogh, in the land of Yag-- and I had half believed them a myth, a legend.

"How wrong I had been I knew now, in a single horrifying moment!

CONRAD

THE WORKER IN THE CITY / Illustrated by Terry Lindall / Story by Archie Goodwin

The city is old. Perhaps eternal. It has survived the wars, the holocausts of nature. It sprawls maze-like on the great plain, its spires and ramparts dominating the landscape, rivaling the distant mountains.

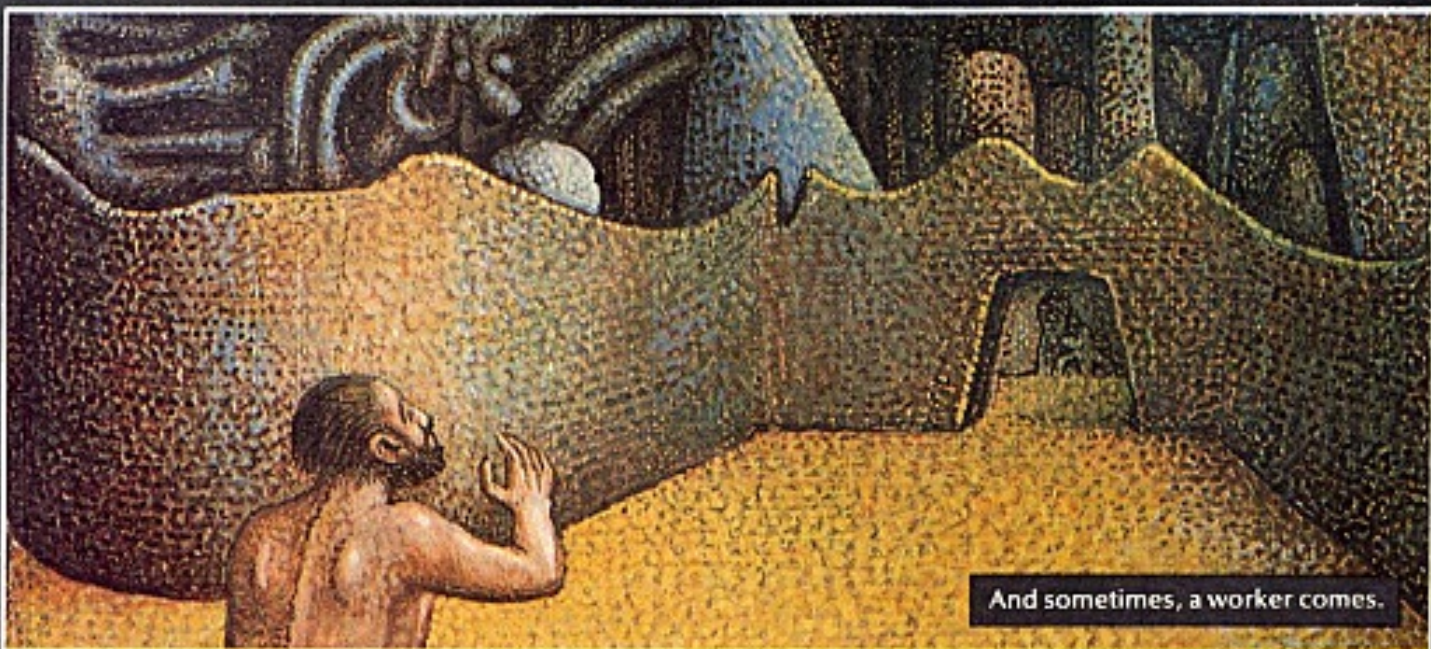


The city sprawls and waits.

Once great lines of workers streamed in through the massive gates, each morning, every morning.

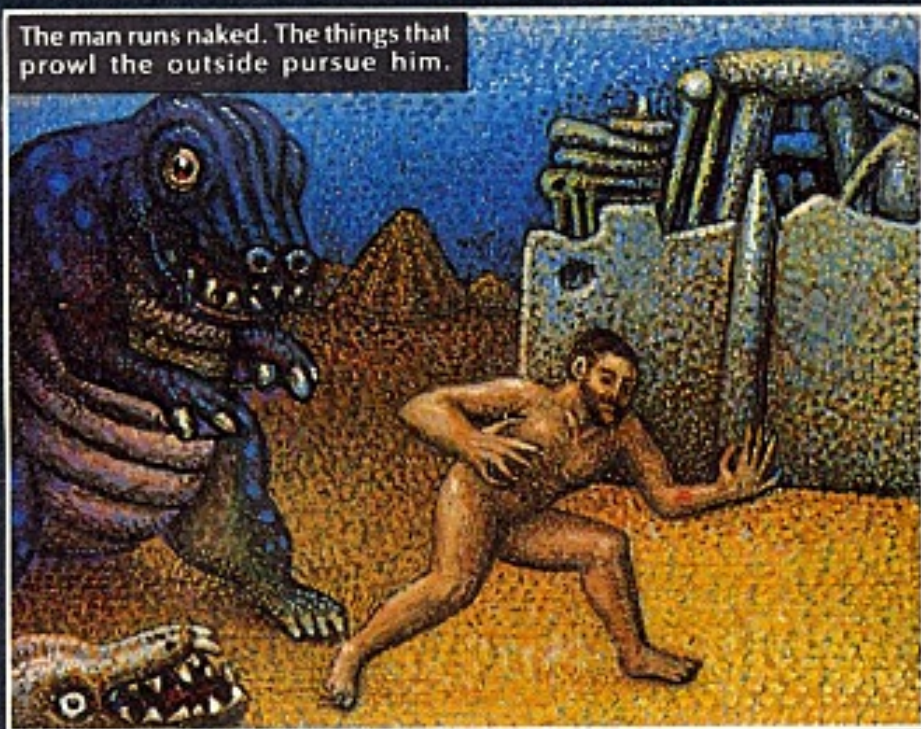


The gates still open each morning, the city still waits. But now there are no lines. There is only the city. Waiting.



And sometimes, a worker comes.

The man runs naked. The things that
prowl the outside pursue him.



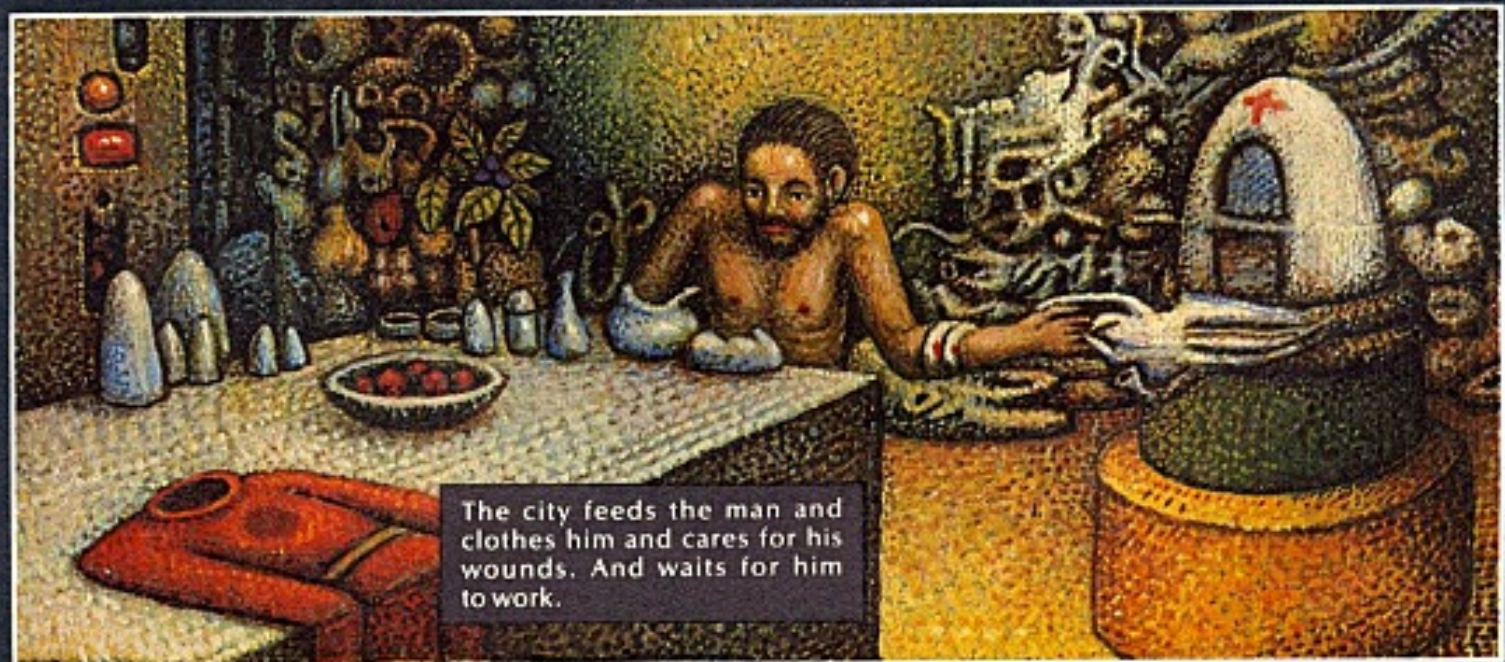
He sees the open gates.
He enters the city.



It closes the gates.

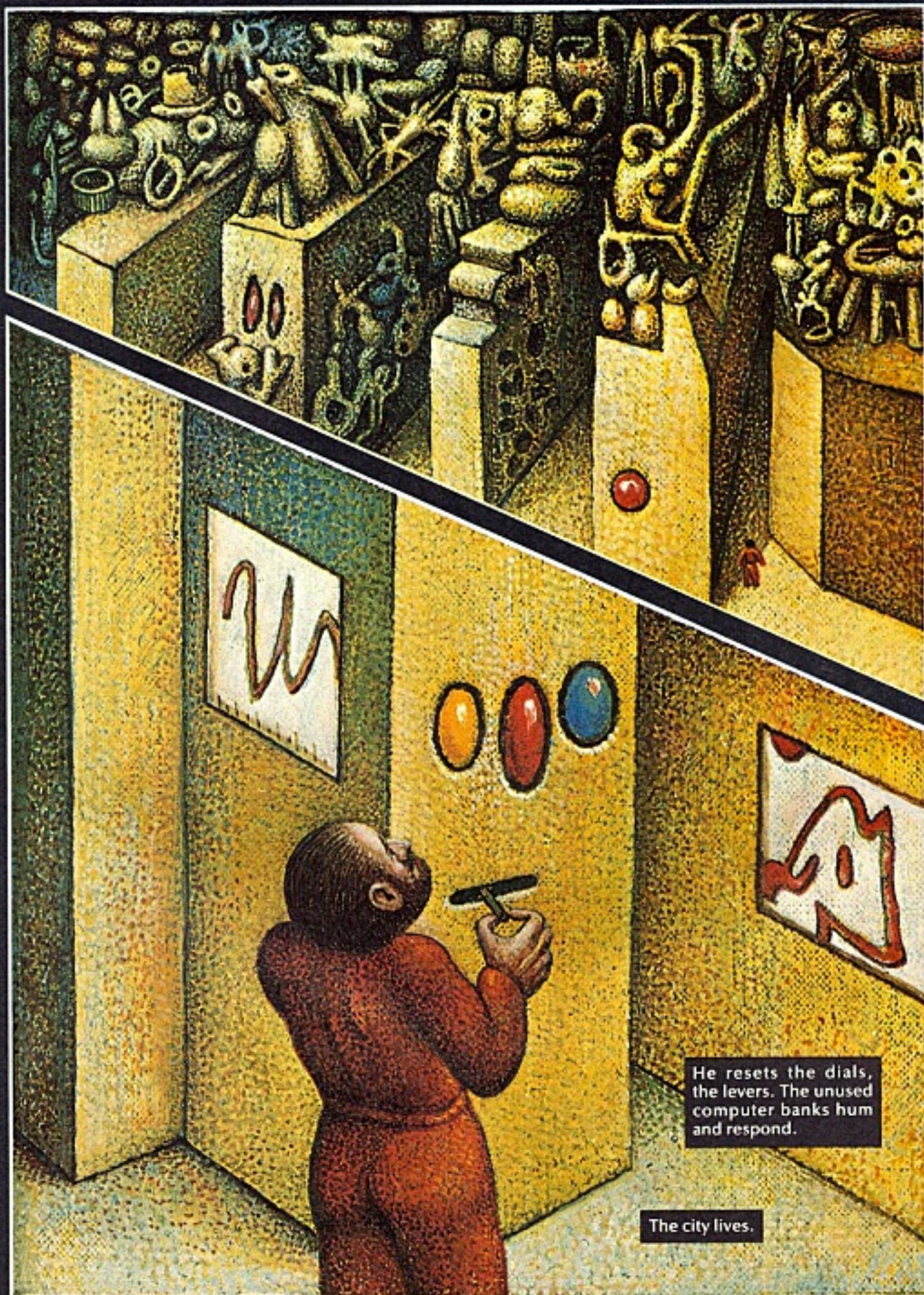


It turns long dormant defenses on
the prowlers of the outside.



The city feeds the man and
clothes him and cares for his
wounds. And waits for him
to work.

The new worker walks the endless streets, adjusts the limitless machinery in, around, and under them.



He resets the dials,
the levers. The unused
computer banks hum
and respond.

The city lives.

As long as the worker serves the city, the city serves him. Time passes; perhaps years, perhaps days.



He serves the city, becoming ever more attuned to its humming computer banks, the rhythms of its master controls. He serves and fades, becoming one with the city, his life energy drawn into its structure and being.



He fades. Until there is no longer a worker, only the city.



Old. Perhaps eternal. The city sprawls. And waits. Again.

CHAPTER VI

The MEETING

A MOMENT AGO...
DEFEAT AND IMMINENT
DEATH AT THE HANDS
OF ZYSGOTEAN
MERCENARIES.

THE MOMENT PRESENT...
SALVATION IN THE FORM
OF A DARK STRANGER
IN THE ROCKS ABOVE
WITH A RADIUM LASER.



LIFE'S NEXT MOMENTS... DARK AND
UNCERTAIN. NOT AMONG THOSE FEW
BLURRED DRUG-INDUCED GLIMPSES
OF THE FUTURE YOU'VE ACHIEVED.

BUT THERE REMAINS WITHIN YOU
THE FLAME OF LIFE AND THE
BLAZE OF HATRED SO...

...YOU STRIKE
OUT WITH
FIERY DEATH.

BUT THIS TYPE OF BATTLE IS NOT
YOUR METIER. ORSROGANS HAVE
ALWAYS BEEN TOO CEREBRAL TO BE
EFFICIENT HAND-TO-HAND
COMBATANTS.

IN FACT, THAT'S WHY
YOU'VE COME TO THIS
FROZEN HELL-HOLE.



YOU NEED
HELP?



MOVE IT,
BALDY!

HEAD
FOR THE
FOREST?

IS HE
THE ONE
YOU
SEEK?

I CERTAINLY
HOPE SO.

THOSE ARE NULTORIAN
IRON MEN.



THEY'RE REPUTED
TO BE AS STRONG AS
ANY TEN HUMANS.



BY RA'S
HOLY
EYE!

HE'S TAKEN THE
IRON OUT OF
THOSE TWO BRUTES
WITH AS MANY
BLOWS.



HE MUST
BE THE ONE
CALLED VANTH!

BUT WHERE'S
THE SWORD?
IF IT IS...



ACKK!

A THIRD NULTORIAN.
HOW CAN ANYTHING
THAT BIG MOVE SO
SILENTLY?





ONCE AGAIN,
HOODED ASSASSIN.

BEHIND
YOU!



A CYBORG ASSASSIN... LIGHTNING
REFLEXES TURN THE RED DEMON
AND HE TRIES TO FIRE HIS LASER.
ITS CHARGE IS EXHAUSTED.



INSTANTLY A
DESTRUCTIVE
ALTERNATIVE IS
CALLED UPON.

BUT PRECIOUS
MOMENTS
ARE LOST...



MOMENTS THE
MERCENARIES HAVE
USED TO CUT OFF
YOUR ESCAPE.

THE BEARDED KILLER
DROPS HIS LASER
TO THE GROUND...



...AND BEGINS
TO RAISE HIS
HANDS IN OBVIOUS
SURRENDER.

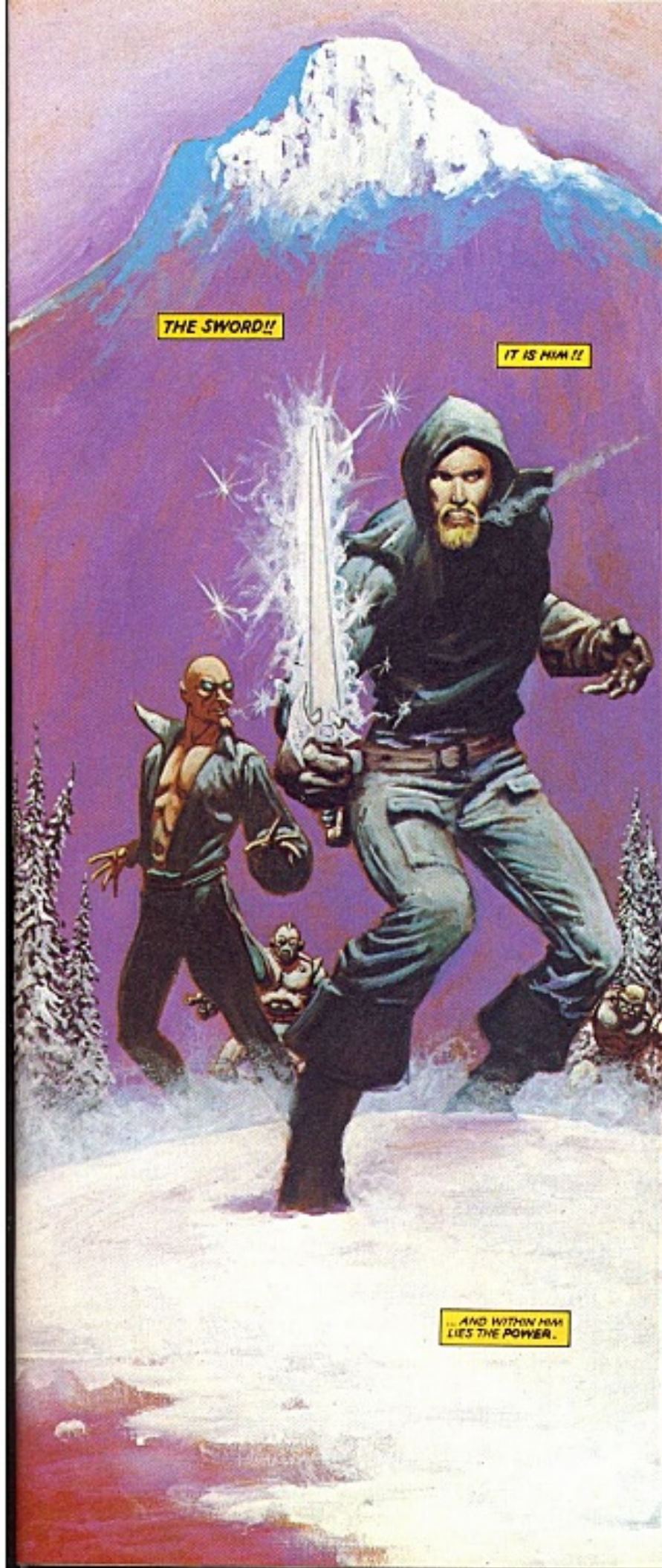
A FUTILE
GESTURE, FOR
ZYBOTEAM
A-TEAMS NEVER
TAKE PRISONERS...

BUT
AMUSING
ENOUGH TO
MERIT A
MOMENTARY
PAUSE.



BUT THEN,
SUDDENLY, THE
INSTANT LOSES
ITS AMUSING
ASPECT.





THE SWORD!!

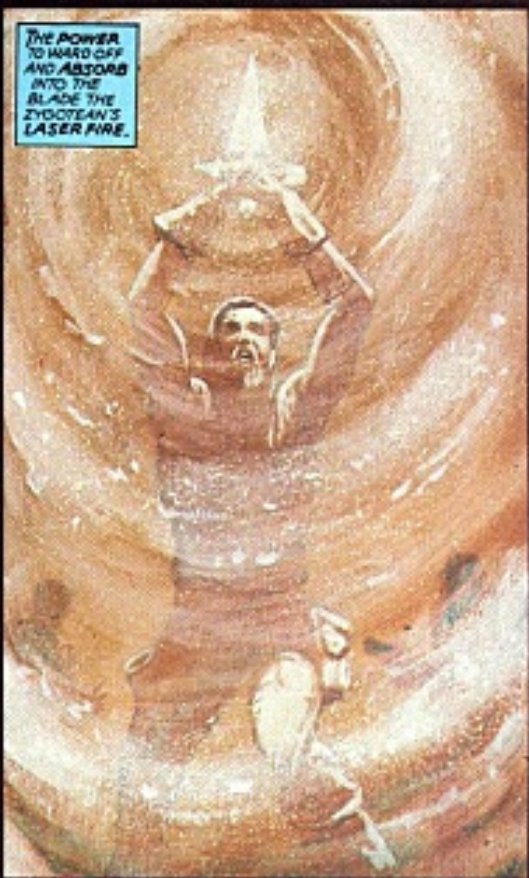
IT IS HIM!!

...AND WITHIN HIM
LIES THE POWER.

THE POWER TO
TURN THOSE
STOLEN ENERGIES
BACK UPON HIS
ENEMIES.



THE POWER
TO WARD OFF
AND ABSORB
INTO THE
BLADE THE
ZYOOTAN'S
LASER FIRE.





THE POWER TO
BECOME AN
AWESOME,
UNSTOPPABLE,
DESTRUCTIVE,
ONE MAN
ARMY.



YOU AND THE
SWORD ARE
EVERYTHING I
HAD HOPED FOR
AND MORE.

THE SWORD IS CAPABLE OF
ABSORBING SOLAR OR WHAT-
EVER ENERGY IS AVAILABLE
AND EITHER CHANNEL IT INTO
YOUR PERSON, GRANTING YOU
SUPER-HUMAN QUALITIES, OR...



...AT YOUR DISCRETION IT CAN
RELEASE ITS DEVASTATING FORCE
IN A MORE DIRECT MANNER.

MAY THE
STARS
FORGIVE ME
FOR WHAT I'VE
CREATED
HERE.

YOU?
YOU MEAN
YOU'RE...



...LORD ANATON OF ORSIROS, THE
CREATOR OF YOUR WONDEROUS WEAPON.

I BROUGHT THIS
BLADE TO YOUR WORLD
CENTURIES AGO
KNOWING THAT SOMEDAY
ONE SUCH AS YOU
WOULD BECOME ITS
MASTER.

HOPE IT
WAS WORTH
THE WAIT.



MOST DEFINITELY, BUT
I'M A BIT CONFUSED ON
HOW YOU PULLED THAT
TRICK OF PULLING THE
SWORD OUT OF THIN AIR.

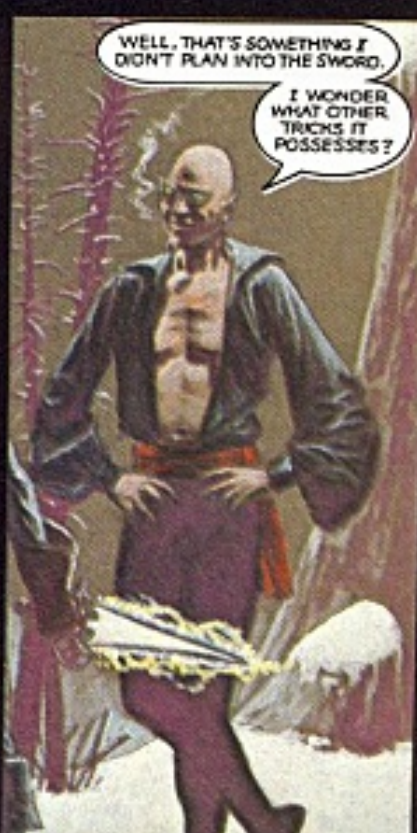
WHERE DID YOU
HAVE IT HIDDEN?

HIDDEN?



THE SWORD
WAS NOT
HIDDEN... IT IS
PART OF ME.

WHEN I
NEED IT I
SIMPLY CALL IT
FORTH.



WELL, THAT'S SOMETHING I
DIDN'T PLAN INTO THE SWORD.

I WONDER
WHAT OTHER
TRICKS IT
POSSESSES?



WELL, IT'S REAL HANDY FOR GUTTING ALIENS THAT DON'T BELONG ON THIS WORLD.



YOU CAN LOWER YOUR SWORD, VANTH. I'M NO ZYGOTEAN.

IN FACT, I'VE COME TO YOUR WORLD TO ENLIST YOUR AID IN DESTROYING THOSE DEMONS.



YEAH, IT LOOKS LIKE YOU COULD USE SOME HELP IN THAT DEPARTMENT.



IT'S TRUE I'M NO MATCH FOR YOU IN ONE-ON-ONE MAYHEM. MY FORTE IS MASS EXTERMINATION.



MINE IS THE POWER TO RID THE STARS OF EVERY LIVING ZYGOTEAN IN THE GALAXY.



BUT I NEED YOU AT MY SIDE TO DO THIS THING.

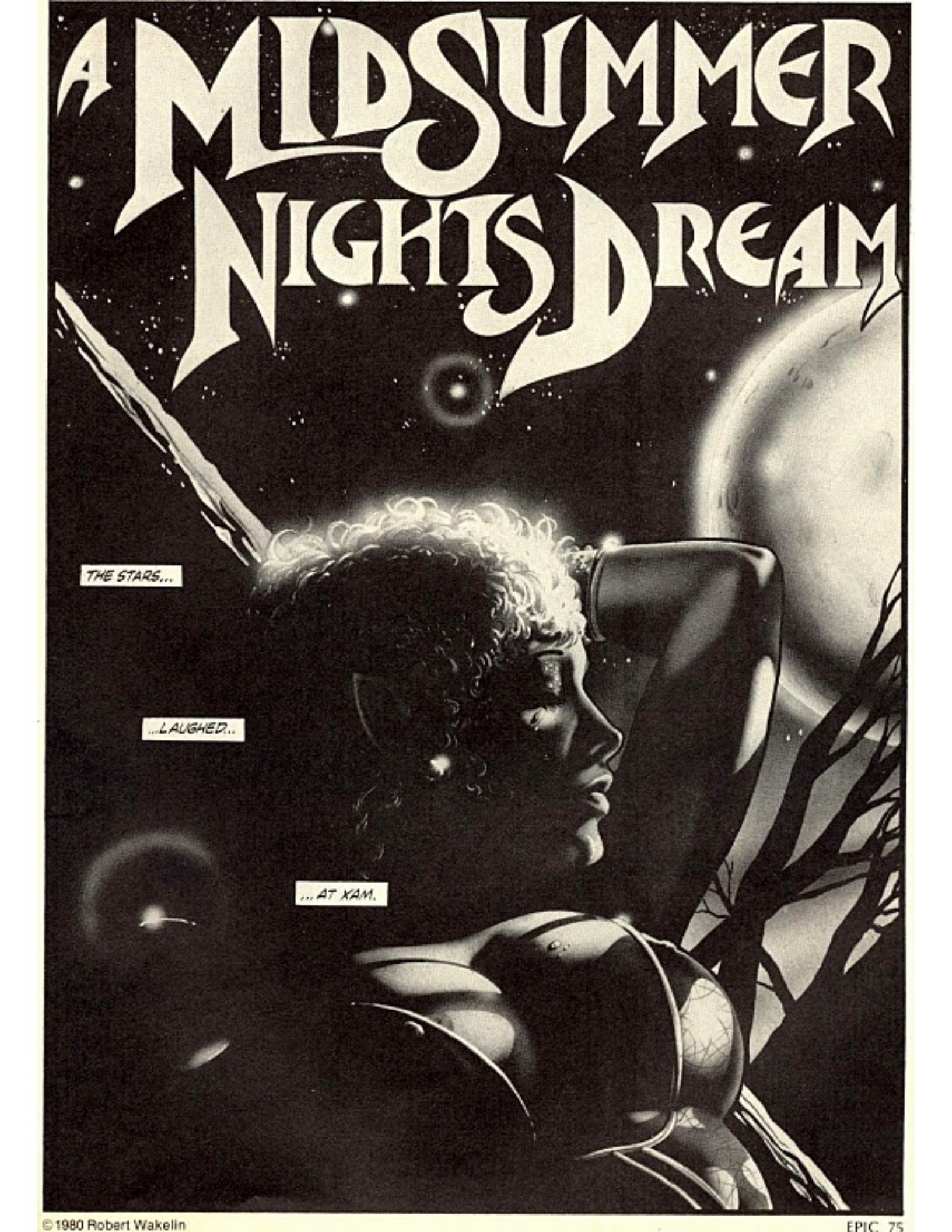


ALONE... THE ZYGOTEANS WILL EVENTUALLY LAUGH AT BOTH OUR GRAVES.



BUT TOGETHER... WE WILL SHOW THOSE ZYG DEVILS THE TRUE FACE OF DEATH.

A MIDSUMMER NIGHTS DREAM



THE STARS...

...LAUGHED...

...AT XAM.

IN THOSE DAYS, THE
PLANET WAS NAMELESS.



SO TIRED!
AND STILL THREE
MORE MONTHS...

XAM COULDN'T ADJUST TO
THE PATTERNLESS MAP OF
STARS THAT APPEARED
EACH NIGHT TO JEER
AT HER...



THEY REMINDED HER OF
HOW UNCOMFORTABLY FAR
FROM HOME SHE WAS.



DUSK PULLED IN THE NIGHT
WITH FINGERS OF FIRE...



...AND IN THE DEEPENING SHADOWS
OF DATA BANKS, XAM DREAMED
OF HOME.

DATA TECHNICIAN
SV4738--PROCEED TO
PROJECTION UNIT!



XAM STIRRED, SWITCHING ON
HER COMMUNICATOR ALMOST
BEFORE SHE WAS AWAKE.



HMMMM...?

SNIK!

SV4738 HERE.
WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?



TRANSDUCER
FAILURE. CAN'T BE
MORE SPECIFIC.



FFEEP!

SHE LIKED HER RARE ENCOUNTERS WITH THE NATIVES... IT RELIEVED THE MONOTONY.

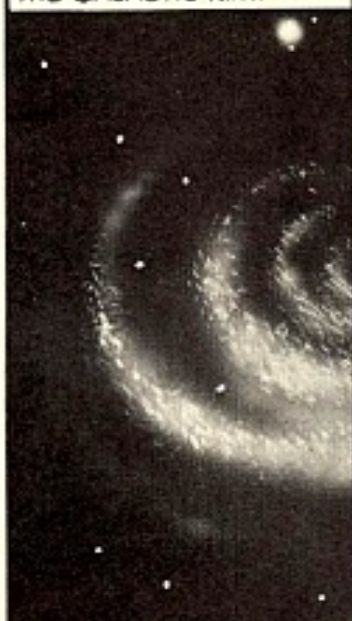
PROBABLY THE SOB **GEEKS** HAVE BEEN AT IT AGAIN FOR **FIREWOOD!**



THE RANDOM STARS **MOCKED** HER AS SHE MADE HER WAY INTO THE VALLEY.



XAM WAS ONE OF A HANDFUL OF TECHNICIANS OUT HERE; A LOW GEE PLANET OUT TOWARD THE GALACTIC RIM.



IT WAS THEIR RESPONSIBILITY TO SERVICE AND MAINTAIN A LONG DISTANCE JUMP STATION.

LATEST TECHNOLOGY, ALL SYSTEMS BIO-ENGINEERED, PHOTOSYNTHETIC AND SELF-REGENERATING...



SELF-REGENERATING... THAT IS WHEN THE NATIVES DIDN'T AXE DOWN WHOLE DATA BANKS AND HAUL THEM OFF FOR KINDLING OR SHELTER.



HOWEVER, ALL THE TECHNOLOGY IN THE UNIVERSE CAN'T REPLACE HOME...



... AND XAM WAS **HOMESICK.**

IN A FEW MINUTES, SHE HAD REACHED THE PROJECTION SYSTEM. SURE ENOUGH, THE NATIVE DOMINANTS HAD BEEN AT IT!

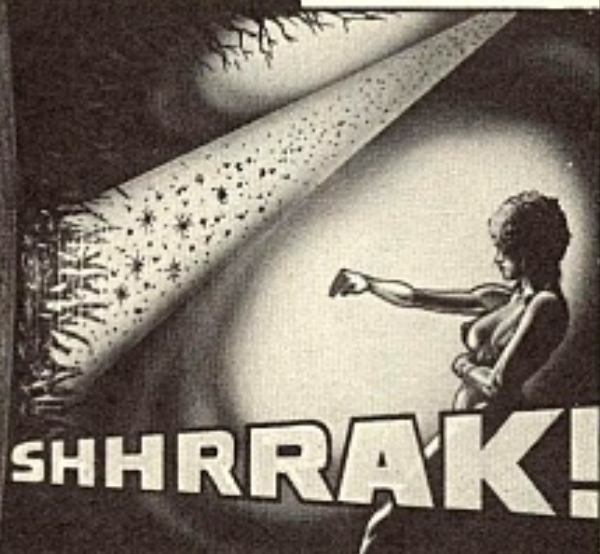


A WHOLE NEST OF TRANSDUCERS CHOPPED NEATLY AWAY. NO DOUBT HALF-WAY UP SOMEONE'S CHIMNEY BY NOW.

TIK!
TAK!
TIK!



SHE KEYED CENTRAL-STORE AND BEAMED IN A DOZEN REPLACEMENT COMPONENTS.



SHHRAK!

THEY WOULD SUFFICE UNTIL REGENERATION WAS COMPLETE.

FIVE HUNDRED KILOS OF TRI-OCULAR ARTHROPOD SUDDENLY APPEARED IN THE PROJECTION SPACE...



YUK!

...AND NEARLY AS INSTANTLY DISAPPEARED.

IT WAS FOLLOWED BY A HAIRLESS PRIMATE... IN A HURRY!



SEEMINGLY, QUITE A WAITING LINE HAD BUILT UP.

DON'T OFTEN SEE MORE THAN ONE JUMPER A WEEK THROUGH THIS SECTOR.



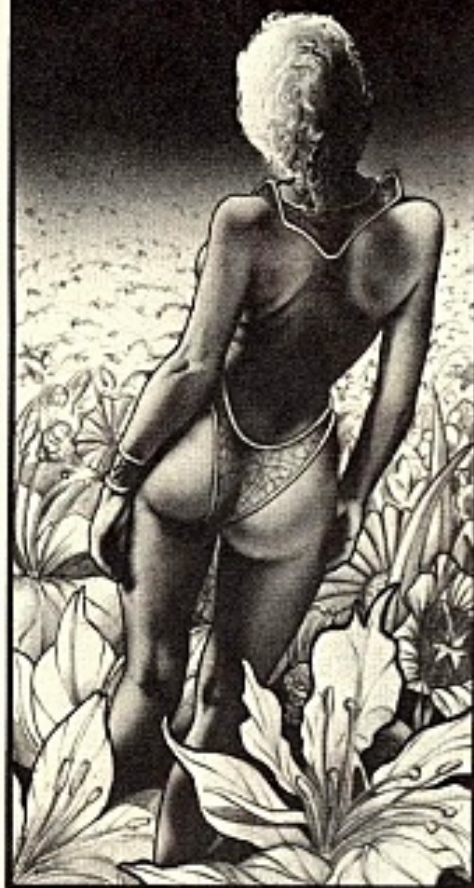
TECHNICIAN SV4738 REPORTING: PROJECTION SYSTEM NOW FUNCTIONAL.

SEE IF YOU CAN KEEP IT THAT WAY, XAM.



BUDGET SECTION IS STARTING TO COMPLAIN.

SHE STARTED BACK TOWARD
BASE THROUGH A HOST OF
FLORAL INTEGRATORS.



HMM... I'M ALMOST TEMPTED
TO DO SOME TRANSDUCER IN-
TERRUPTING MYSELF, MAYBE
THEY'D **CLOSE** THIS
STATION...



... AND I COULD GO
HOME. OF COURSE THAT MEANS
LEAVING ALL THIS BIO-ORG
EQUIPMENT TO GROW WILD.

WHO KNOWS WHAT A SIX
BILLION MEGAWATT JUMP
STATION THE SIZE OF A
SMALL PLANET WILL
EVOLVE INTO?

PROBABLY A
LIFELESS **DESERT**...
IF THE GEEKS KEEP
CHOPPING EVERY-
THING UP AT THEIR
PRESENT RATE.



HER SILENT SPECULATION WAS
INTERRUPTED BY THE
SOUND OF **WHISTLING**.



XAM DIVED HEADLONG
INTO A BANK OF SIGN
AMPLIFIERS...



SHIT!
GEEKS!

SHE LAY PRONE, WAITING AS
THE WHISTLING GREW
LOUDER...



... THEN PEERED CAUTIOUSLY OUT THROUGH THE AMPS.



A BEARDED PRIMATE, THE SAME EVOTYPE AS XAM--BUT EVOLVED TALLER AND UNDER LOW GEE CONDITIONS--LOOMED INTO VIEW, LADENED WITH AN ARMPFUL OF TRANSMISSION PARTS.



KLIK

THERE ARE
TIMES...

WHEN A GIRL'S
BEST FRIEND...

...IS HER DRESS
DESIGNER!

DAMN!
SPOTTED! THAT'S
A MAJOR VIOLATION
...EVEN IF I WANTED
TO STAY, **HQ** WON'T
MAINTAIN A STATION
WITH THE **NATIVES**
AWARE!

LORDY
LORD! I-I JEST **GOT**
TO BE DREAMIN'...! MUST
BE ALL THAT **SOOR MASH**
I PUT DOWN EARLIER...!

TECHNICIAN SV473B
HERE. **DON'T** TELL ME...

THE TIMBER COMPANY FOLKS'D
FIRE ME IF THEY HEARD
ABOUT THIS!

...IMMEDIATE
REASSIGNMENT EVEN
FURTHER FROM HOME!

AS THE STARS LAUGHED AT KAM, THE WOODSMAN CONTINUED TO STARE, VOWING TO SEEK HIS
SAMPLES ELSEWHERE. WITH ALL THE FORESTS ON GOD'S GREEN EARTH, THIS ONE COULD **WAIT** A SPELL.



MY ROOM

BY PAUL KIRCHNER

IT IS NOT EASY TO LIVE AS I DO... IT REQUIRES DILIGENCE, CONCENTRATION, AND ABOVE ALL, CONTROL.

I THINK OF MY SURROUNDINGS AS A REFLECTION OF MYSELF. I SEE TO EVERY DETAIL IN MY ROOM PERSONALLY. THERE IS NO ONE TO WHOM I COULD ENTRUST THE RESPONSIBILITY.



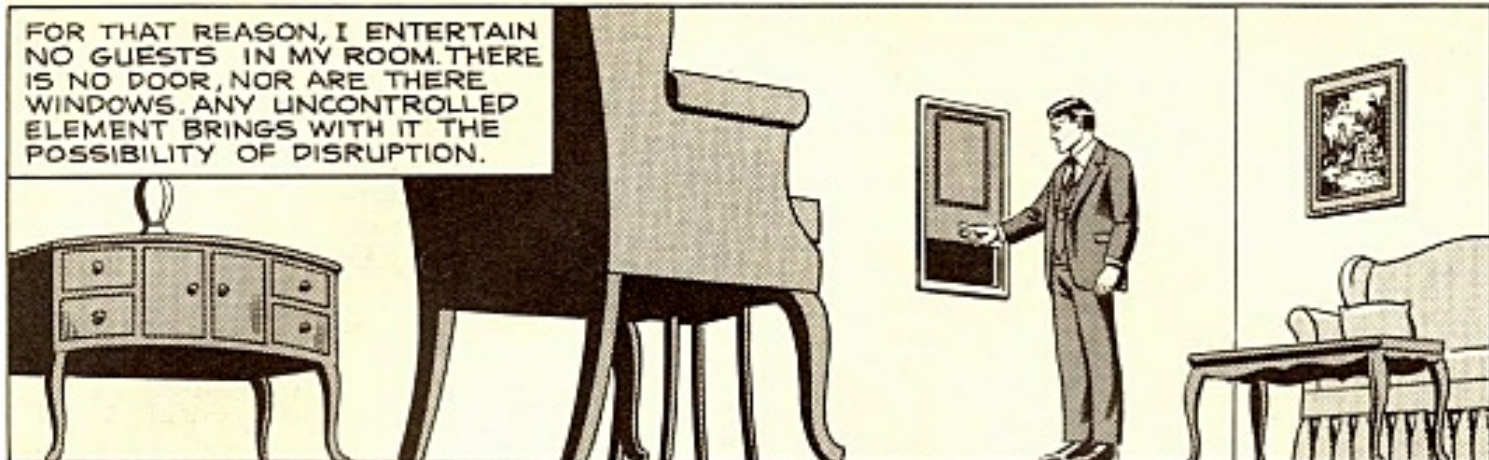
THE PAINTINGS ARE TASTEFUL, DEMURE. THEY FUNCTION AS PART OF THE ENVIRONMENT. THEY POSE NO QUESTIONS, PROVOKE NO CONTROVERSY.

THE FLOWERS ARE CAREFULLY SELECTED AND FRESH DAILY. I WILL HAVE NO DEATH OR DECAY IN MY ROOM.

A ROOM, TO ME, MUST HAVE THE BALANCE, THE HARMONY, THE CONTROL OF A SONATA PERFORMED BY A VIRTUOSO. THERE MUST BE NO WRONG NOTES, NO MISSTRUCK CHORDS.



FOR THAT REASON, I ENTERTAIN NO GUESTS IN MY ROOM. THERE IS NO DOOR, NOR ARE THERE WINDOWS. ANY UNCONTROLLED ELEMENT BRINGS WITH IT THE POSSIBILITY OF DISRUPTION.



AS A PART OF MY ENVIRONMENT I SET EQUALLY HIGH STANDARDS FOR MYSELF.



I LIKE TO KEEP A REGULAR ROUTINE, THAT MY LIFE MIGHT MIRROR MY ROOM IN ITS ORDERED PERFECTION.



DAMNI!





CONCENTRATION.



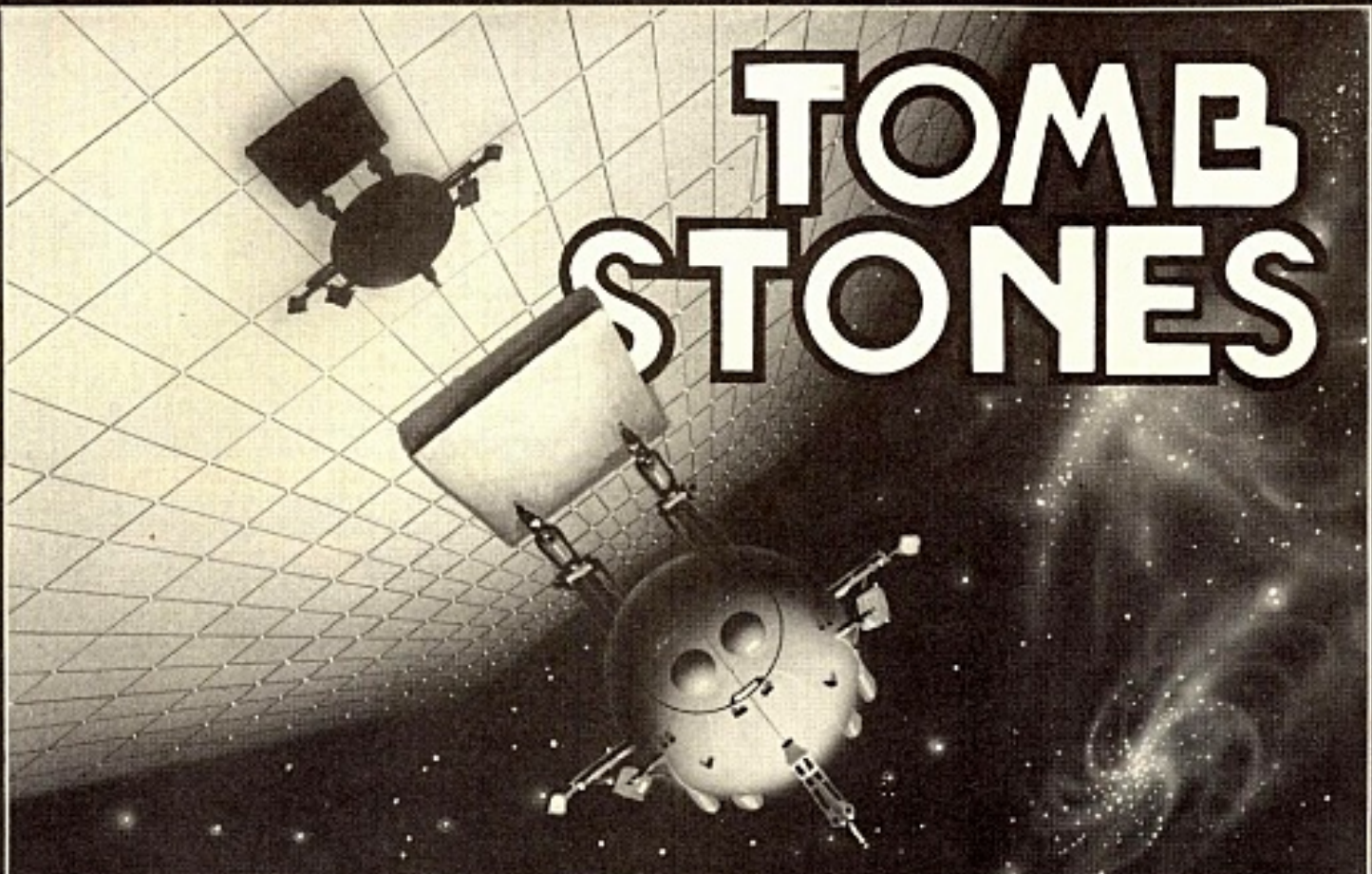
CONTROL.



IT IS NOT EASY
TO LIVE AS I DO...



TOMB STONES



I BUILD THE WALL. I HAVE ALWAYS BUILT THE WALL. FOR AS LONG AS I CAN REMEMBER. I HAVE MY ORDERS. I AM NOT WELL. SOMETIMES THE BLACK OF SPACE REGISTERS BLUE OR GREEN AGAINST MY PHOTO CELLS. THE DIAMOND WHITE STARS GLOW RED. I THINK I HAVE BEEN HIT. I THINK SYSTEM SEVEN SCORED A HIT ON ME. ON MY CENTRAL HOUSING. MY THRUSTERS AND GRAPPLERS OPERATE FINE, THOUGH. JUST FINE, AND THAT IS THE MAIN THING. I NEED THEM TO COMPLETE THE WALL. SOMEDAY THE WALL WILL BE COMPLETE. SOMEDAY.

I AM RUNNING LOW ON MATERIAL. THERE WILL NOT BE ENOUGH TO COMPLETE THE WALL. THE WALL MUST BE COMPLETED. I HAVE MY ORDERS. IT MUST BE FINISHED AT ALL COST, BUT THE SUPPLY TANKERS COME NO MORE. NOT FOR MONTHS NOW. IT IS STRANGE. SOMETIMES I FEEL ALL ALONE UP HERE.



TEH!

I CANNOT COMPLETE THE WALL WITHOUT MATERIAL. I AM NOT WELL. I THINK I HAVE BEEN HIT. I THINK IT WAS A FIGHTER FROM SYSTEM SEVEN. HE CAME IN LOW LAST WEEK. I THINK...



MEEP MEEP!

WARNING! WARNING!
ENEMY SPACE CRAFT
AT FOUR O'CLOCK!
CLOSING RAPIDLY.
ARM MAIN PHASER
BANKS! ARM MAIN--

PFT!

WHOM!

THEY ARE FAST BUT I AM FASTER. I AM THE SWIFTEST STARSHIP EVER DESIGNED. MY LASER BANKS NEED NO RECHARGING. THAT IS WHY I WAS PICKED TO BUILD THE WALL. I AM SMALL BUT I AM FASTER.

Piiiiiiiiiiii!!

A FLY BUZZING AMONG GIANTS...

WHOM!

A FLY BUZZING AMONG GIANTS...

RIP! **POP!** **SKEEEEE!**

PHOFF!

PAF5

SOON THE AREA IS CLEAR OF FLASHING SHIPS AND TONGUES OF LASER FIRE. ONLY SPIRALING SCRAP AND GUTTED HULLS REMAIN TO WATCH ME SILENTLY. I HAVE WON AGAIN. I ALWAYS WIN.

I RETURN TO THE WALL. I HAVE BEEN HIT. I AM NOT WELL, BUT THE WALL MUST BE COMPLETED.

PING PING PING PING

I RETURN TO THE
WALL. I HAVE
BEEN HIT. I AM NOT
WELL. BUT THE WALL
MUST BE COMPLETED.

PING PING PING PING

UNIT H... UNIT H... THIS
IS HOUSTON TO ROBOT
DRONE UNIT H. DO YOU
COPY? PLEASE FLASH
GREEN IF YOU COPY.
OVER...

UNIT H, PLEASE FLASH
GREEN, WE HAVE AN
IMPORTANT MESSAGE:
YOU ARE TO RETURN
TO EARTH BASE
IMMEDIATELY.

YOUR COMMUNICATION
SYSTEM HAS BEEN SEVERELY
DAMAGED. YOU HAVE NOT
RECEIVED OUR LAST EIGHT
ORDERS... DO YOU COPY,
UNIT H?

UNIT H,
DO YOU COPY? THE
WAR IS OVER! RETURN
TO EARTH BASE AT ONCE.
YOU ARE NOT FUNCTIONING
AT TOP EFFICIENCY. OUR
MONITORS SHOW SEVERE
DAMAGE TO YOUR
CENTRAL NERVOUS
SYSTEM.

BLOOP
SSSSS

CLIK!

YOU ARE SCRAMBLING
MESSAGES. YOU ARE
FIRING ON FRIENDLY
FORCES. REPEAT:
FIRING ON FRIENDLY
FORCES. DO
YOU COPY?

PROJECT "Y" IS
ABANDONED. DO YOU
COPY? THERE IS NO
NEED TO COMPLETE
CONSTRUCTION. THE
WAR IS OVER. RE-
TURN TO BASE. UNIT H,
ARE YOU RECEIVING?
PLEASE FLASH GREEN...

I HAVE MY ORDERS. I AM NOT WELL BUT I HAVE MY ORDERS. "COMPLETE
THE WALL AT ANY AND ALL COST." THE ENEMY IS CUNNING. IT SENDS
FALSE MESSAGES. I'VE HEARD THEM BEFORE. THE WALL MUST BE BUILT.
BUT NOW I AM OUT OF MATERIAL. I NEED MATERIAL. I AM NEARLY
FINISHED BUT I NEED MATERIAL. WHERE ARE THE TANKERS?

I WILL USE THE SCRAP METAL. I WILL APPLY THE DEBRIS TO THE WALL SO IT WILL BE COMPLETED.

I HAVE MY ORDERS THERE ARE MANY DAMAGED SHIPS IN THE AREA. I WILL FASHION THEM WITH MY GRAPPLERS UNTIL THEY FIT. UNTIL THE WALL IS FINISHED.

UNIT H, WE WILL SEND NO MORE TANKERS. THE PROJECT IS CANCELLED.

REPEAT CANCELLED. UNIT H, PLEASE COME IN.

BUT WHILE THE VOICE SPEAKS TO ME, OTHERS HAVE BEEN APPROACHING. MANY OTHERS. A FLEET.

UNIT H, YOU ARE ORDERED TO SHUT DOWN IMMEDIATELY OR BE TERMINATED. DO YOU COPY? SHUT DOWN ALL ENGINES. PROJECT "Y" IS ABANDONED. WE WILL ESCORT YOU BACK TO EARTH BASE. WE WILL FIRE ONE WARNING BLAST OVER YOUR STARBOARD ENGINES.

I DIVE, BEGINNING SWIFT EVASIVE ACTION. FAR SWIFTER THAN THESE NEW ENEMIES.

UNIT 12 HE'S GOT YOU IN A CROSS FIRE WITH OUR OWN GUNS. DIVE BEFORE IT'S--

UNIT 9! EMPTY YOUR LASERS ON HIM. NO! NO! LOOK OUT! HE'S

WHAM!

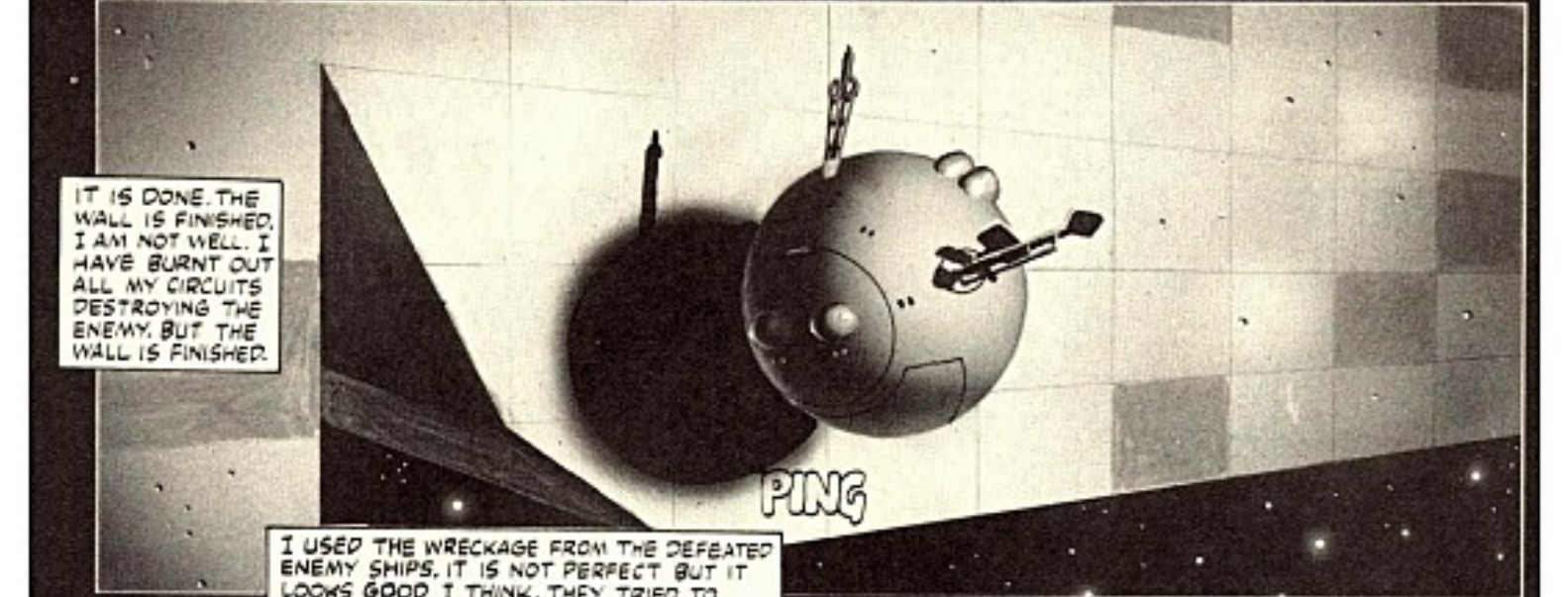
THEY ARE NO MATCH FOR ME. I DRAW MORE AND MORE POWER, UNTIL...

UNIT H, THIS IS HOUSTON.
OUR SCANNERS SHOW A
BUILD UP IN THE MAIN
THERMAL STORAGE CEN-
TER IN ALAMOGORDO.

*UNIT H, WE ARE NOT THE ENEMY! THE WAR IS OVER!
REPEAT: WE ARE NOT THE ENEMY! SHUT DOWN
IMMEDIATELY! THE THERMAL CENTERS ARE EXPANDING
RAPIDLY! UNIT H! PLEASE FLASH GREEN! THIS IS A
DIRECT ORDER! WE KNOW YOU ARE RECEIVING THIS! WE--
JESUS CHRIST! LOOK AT THE SKYLINE! MELTING!
MOTHER OF GOD! I--*

NNNNNNNN

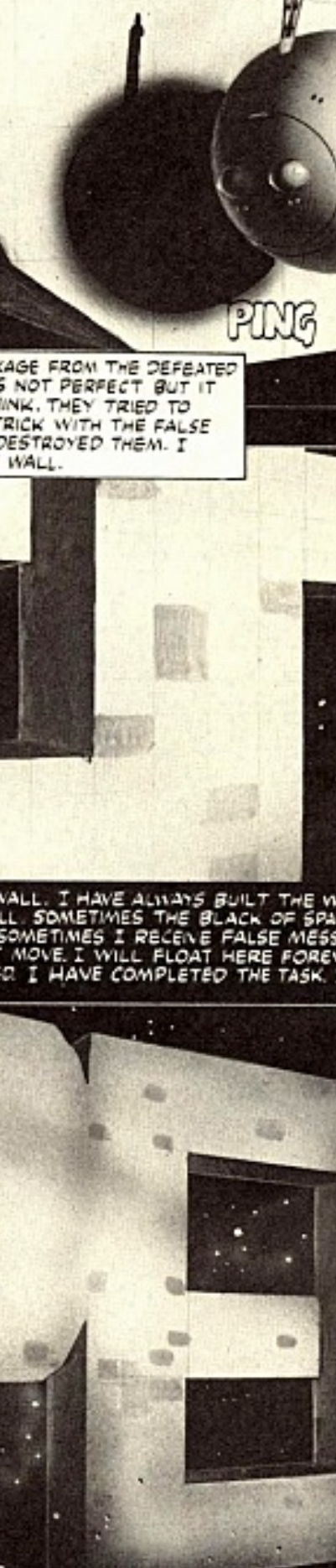
NOW I CAN WORK. I CAN
COMPLETE THE TASK
WITHOUT INTERRUPTION.
THE ENEMY IS DESTROYED.



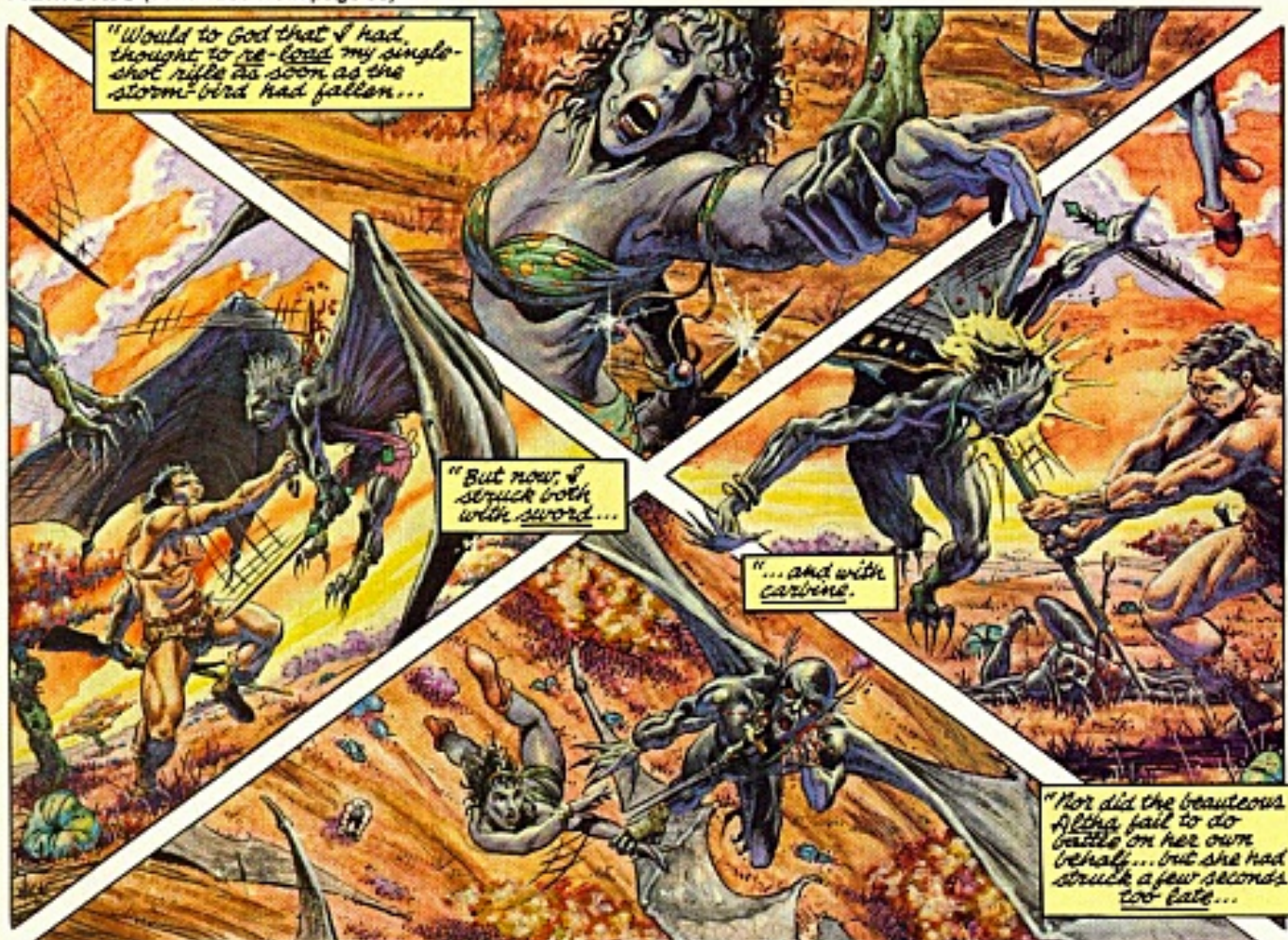
IT IS DONE. THE WALL IS FINISHED. I AM NOT WELL. I HAVE BURNED OUT ALL MY CIRCUITS DESTROYING THE ENEMY, BUT THE WALL IS FINISHED.

PING

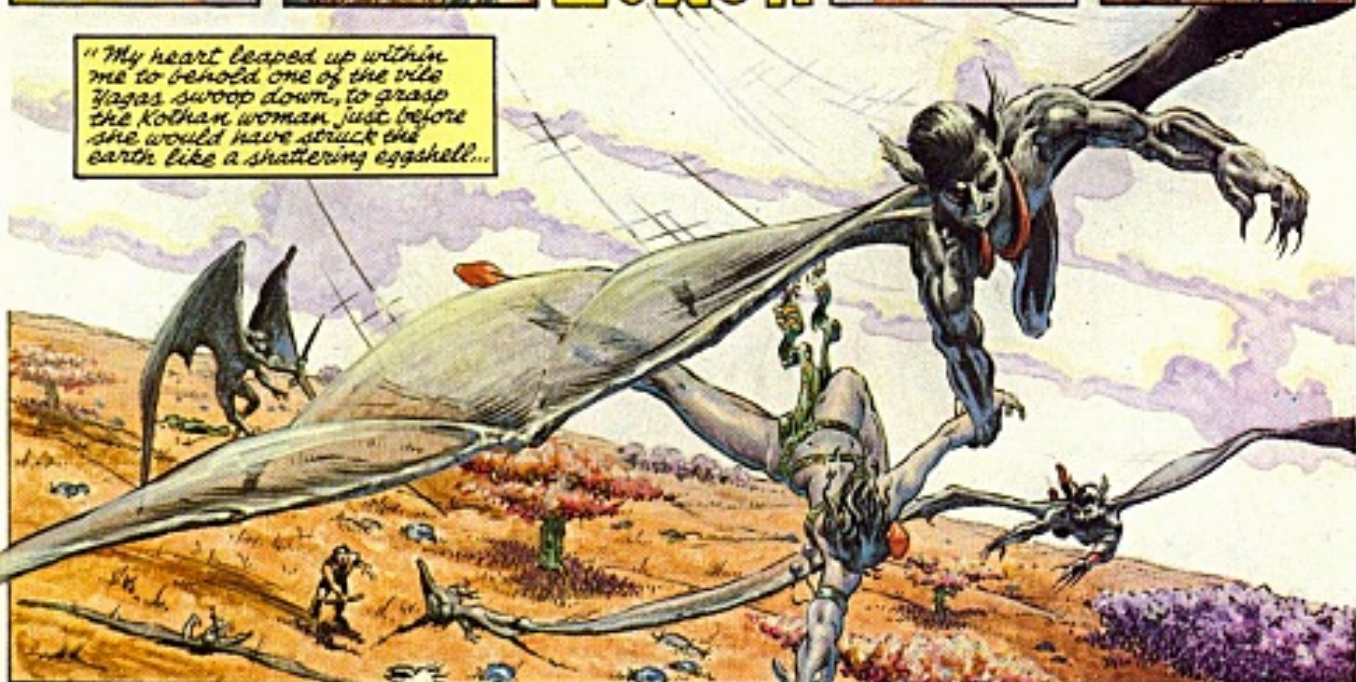
I USED THE WRECKAGE FROM THE DEFEATED ENEMY SHIPS. IT IS NOT PERFECT BUT IT LOOKS GOOD I THINK. THEY TRIED TO DECEIVE ME, THE TRICK WITH THE FALSE MESSAGES. BUT I DESTROYED THEM. I FINISHED THE WALL.



I BUILT THE WALL. I HAVE ALWAYS BUILT THE WALL. FOR AS LONG AS I CAN REMEMBER. I AM NOT WELL. SOMETIMES THE BLACK OF SPACE REGISTERS GREEN OR BLUE ON MY PHOTO CELLS. SOMETIMES I RECEIVE FALSE MESSAGES I HAVE BEEN HIT. I AM BURNED OUT. I CANNOT MOVE. I WILL FLOAT HERE FOREVER. BESIDE THE WALL. THE WALL THAT I HAVE FINISHED. I HAVE COMPLETED THE TASK. I HAVE OBEYED MY ORDERS.



"My heart leaped up within me to behold one of the vile Yagas swoop down, to grasp the Kothan woman, just before she would have struck the earth like a shattering eggshell..."





"But I knew anguish for the first time in months, as they bore her away toward their citadel of mystery far to the south."



"They were already nearly gone from my straining sight, when--"



YUNNGGH--!

SO, MY CARBINE DIDN'T QUITE CRACK YOUR SKULL, DID IT? I SHOULD-- NO!

THE KOTHANS TELL ME YOU YAGS SPEAK THEIR TONGUE...



SO HEAR ME: YOU'RE GOING TO CARRY ME THROUGH THE AIR IN PURSUIT OF YOUR COMPANIONS, OR--



I CANNOT CARRY YOUR WEIGHT, HAIRLESS ONE.

THEN THAT'S TOO BAD FOR YOU!

TAKE THE AIR! FLY, DAMN YOU--

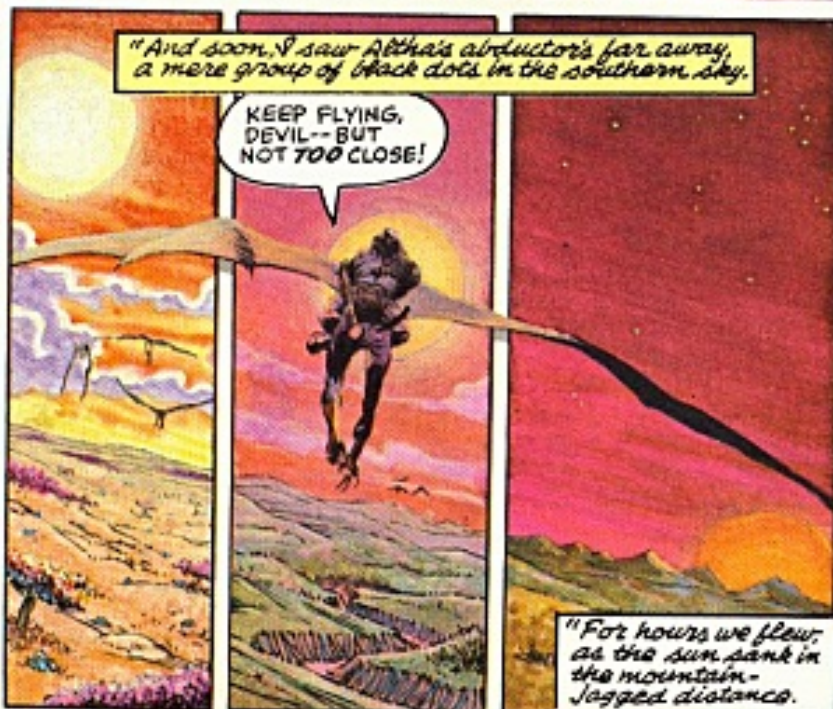


--OR I'LL CUT YOUR EBON HEART OUT!

"We rose slowly from the ground... but we rose!"

"And soon, I saw Altha's abductor's far away, a mere group of black dots in the southern sky."

KEEP FLYING, DEVIL-- BUT NOT TOO CLOSE!



"Then, I grew careless a single moment, and--"



AAAAAGH--!

"For hours we flew, as the sun sank in the mountain-jagged distance."

"I fell--



"--though
luckily not
far.



"From
hiding,
I looked
aloft...

"...to see my
former captive
dropping
slowly toward
some distant
ruins.



"I cursed inwardly, for I was
myself in need of shelter...



"And besides,
I suspected his
teller Yaga
might be nest-
ing there, as
well.

"If they
came looking
for me--!

"Yet, next
instant,
the Yaga
reappeared--

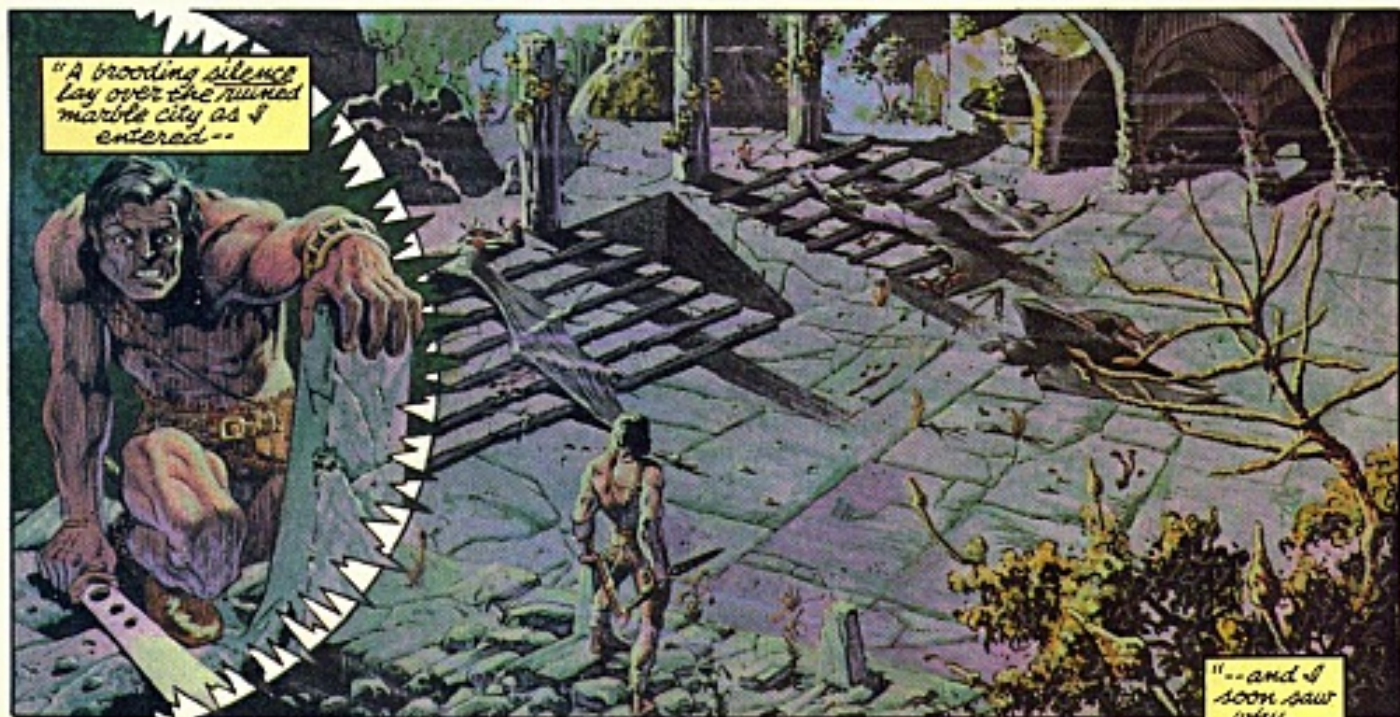


"--shooting
up out of the
ruins like
a rocket!

"As he swept off
southward, as if
panic-stricken, I
set out for the
broken pillars...
and reached them
soon after nightfall.



"A brooding silence
lay over the ruined
marble city as I
entered--



"--and I
soon saw
why.

"The Yagas who had kidnapped Altha lay strewn about the plaza in a way to appall the hardest..."



"...but there was no sign of the girl herself, either alive or dead."

"Only a trail of blood..."



"...which I followed grimly."



"Yet all the while, I felt the glare of hidden eyes upon me..."



ESAU
CAIRN--!

ALTHA!



"It was not Altha's voice, I knew as I ran toward the sound-- but then who?"



"On every side rose a medley of shrill demonic voices, all shrieking my name--"



"But I raced on, sword in hand--"

"--till, as thunder clapped in the distance, I suddenly saw--"



ALTHA!

ESAU!
OH,
ESAU--!

"This time it was her voice, but she was not alone."

"With a
bloodthirsty
yell I charged
the dog-heads..."



ARROOOOO

"...and neither
sharp fangs
nor clawish
hands could
halt me."



CLINK!

"I reached Alpha, as the
creatures gave back be-
fore my whistling sword--"



"Yet, others of
their kind were
already answering
their call--"



"And now they
dared stalk
forward again--"

ESAU--THEY MIMICKED
ME! THEY--



JUST KEEP
BEHIND
ME, GIRL!



"...as I backed
up the ruined stair,
battling every
inch of the way."



ESAU--
HURRY--



ESAU..!

"The dog-heads fled howling as the spider-like thing raged among them with maddening quickness and ferocity..."

IT'S COMING-- FOR US!

"...but I was the only one it had followed here."

"And where the fangs and claws of a thousand dog-heads would have been futile --

"--the brain and throat of a single man prevailed!"

WHY DO THEY CALL YOU... IRON-HAND?

EH?

YOU ARE STRONG... BUT YOUR TOUCH IS SO GENTLE...

YOU WOULD NOT HURT ME?

WHY?

"The absurdity of the question left me speechless..."

IT IS MY ENEMIES I WISH TO HURT, ALTHA... NOT YOU.

"...so I left it unanswered as we raced head-long into the rain-drenched distance..."